



# **Collaborative Resolution Services, Inc.**

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## **Teambuilding Attitude Conflict Transformation<sup>®</sup> Training and Neuroscience**

Law enforcement agencies are under intense pressure to change; corrections for its inability to significantly reduce recidivism and its high costs; police agencies because of over aggressive officers and their hostile relationship with minority communities. These issues are directly related to the fact that both correctional officers and police officers suffer from toxic stress with devastating consequences; high rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, obesity, marital conflict [divorce], alcohol/drug abuse, suicide and a shortened life span of 20 years. Agencies realize this crisis, but have been frustrated in their efforts to effectively deal with it.

A number of agencies have introduced programs to help reduce officer stress, among them are Cop2Cop, peer support and crisis intervention support initiatives. These may be valuable, but they are not the answer in themselves. Existing literature on crisis-focused psychological intervention programs, including both Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and Critical Incident Stress Management lack rigorous research making it difficult to attribute any positive findings about the effects of this intervention. (Cohen 221) Further, a meta-analysis of stress management interventions failed to identify any significant effects of those interventions on physical, behavioral and physiological forms of stress. (Cohen 216)

These interventions focus on the damaging effects of stress rather than preventing the stress from occurring in the first place. They focus on the symptom rather than the root cause, which is the toxic work culture. It is easier to try to lower individual staff member's stress level than to change the agencies work culture, in which its members are invested.

This reminds me of the following legend:

*A wise man was walking alone in the forest when he heard a lot of commotion. He was curious, so walked toward the noise to investigate. What he came upon was a crowd frantically pulling babies out of the river. They screamed at him to help save the babies. They talked about improving security by building platforms and dikes to ensure no babies escaped their grasp. The wise man acknowledged them, but kept walking. They were furious at how heartless the wise man was. He continued on his journey until he came to a bridge. Upon walking across the bridge, the elevation gave him a completely different perspective and he saw up the river the reason the babies were falling in. He proceeded to the problem area and helped those people solve the problem. No more babies fell into the river.*

This is the current situation in which law enforcement finds itself. There is a need to deal with the impact of the toxic stress, but at the same time, it is important to also deal with the cause of it in order to limit future damage.

Knowing there is a toxic work culture and transforming it are two entirely different issues. A work culture, especially a para-military one, can be so strong it forces its members to embrace the common attitude if they are to survive. These attitudes are subconscious and they become

the culture. This is why they are so intractable. Policy changes are important, but they have proven to be relatively ineffective at changing attitudes. As one agency head said, "Culture eats policy for lunch." So a different approach needs to be used. A new staff development training modality that directly impacts the subconscious is needed. The Teambuilding Attitude Conflict Transformation<sup>®</sup> [TACT<sup>®</sup>] training is such a model. Before we explain the TACT<sup>®</sup> training, it might be useful to look at the neuroscience behind the physical and psychological changes caused by a toxic work culture.

### **The Neuroscience of Stress**

Stress is normal, healthy and necessary for survival. That is why we have it. We need it for when we are in danger. High levels of cortisol are released in the brain, which shuts down unnecessary parts like the hippocampus [memory, emotions, motivation], and neo-cortex [thinking], along with other parts of the brain's limbic system [subconscious]. Everything is focused in the moment on survival. When the threat is over, the cortisol level returns to a normal level. The problem occurs when the cortisol level never diminishes and that is what happens with chronic stress. The constant bombardment of cortisol literally damages the brain, physically. It damages the hippocampus and neo-cortex [more on this later], but it also affects the DNA. At the end of each DNA strand there are two tails called telomeres. These govern how the DNA is replicated. Think of the DNA as the blueprint while the telomeres interpret it.

Too much cortisol damages the telomeres and they shorten. This results in inaccurate replication causing malformation of cells (disease) or unrestricted replication (cancer). This means our body is reproducing damaged cells replacing healthy ones. (Harris Pg.87) The significance of this can be seen when we consider that our body replaces its cells on average every 7 years [some cells live a matter of days and some never die]. This has a negative impact on the neurological system as well as the immune system, the hormonal system and cardiovascular system. (Harris Pg.65) That is why chronic stress is so damaging. It leads to aggressive behavior, poor judgment, poor planning, and poor decision-making, (Harris Pg.68) along with many physical maladies such as allergies, eczema, asthma, arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer. (Harris Pg.73) No wonder law enforcement personnel are experiencing the physical and psychological problems they are!

However, these changes do not have to be permanent. Certain activities increase the length of telomeres. These activities include adequate sleep, mental health counseling, healthy relationships, exercise, proper nutrition and especially meditation. (Harris Pg.111) All of these positively impact the limbic system in the brain bypassing the neo-cortex. This is the reason lecture and information are not sufficient for changing attitudes and subconscious driven behavior, and why experiential learning opportunities are so important for change to occur. With this understanding, let's return to the TACT<sup>®</sup> model of staff development training.

### **The Importance of Emotional Intelligence**

At the core of any culture is the emotional intelligence of its members. A high level of emotional intelligence will reflect a healthy positive culture. A low level of emotional intelligence will result in a negative or toxic culture. Increasing the emotional intelligence [EQ] of individuals can be done with appropriate staff development training along with appropriate policy changes. This is

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especially true in law enforcement, which is primarily a people business requiring good people skills.

Training law enforcement staff in emotional intelligence skills is more important today than ever.

- More mental health issues with justice involved individuals
- More violent offenders
- Supervisors not trained in emotional intelligence, which is critical for quality leadership
- Staff conflict increases stress resulting in lower morale
- High staff turnover means more inexperienced staff
- High staff turnover means more mandatory overtime
  - Normal sleep reduced to less than required for mental/physical health
  - Increased stress at home
  - Increased cortisol in brain negatively impacting function
- Lack of emotional intelligence skills leads to poor teamwork and results in higher use of threat and physical force creating higher violence and more conflict with justice involved individuals
- Low EQ means a lack of understanding of impact of trauma and PTSD resulting in an increase use of force and violence
- Staff don't feel supported by management when EQ is low and morale suffers

It is important to note that some may think of EQ as simply interpersonal communications or IPC training. IPC is part of EQ, but only part of it. An analogy of the relationship would be classroom driver's education vs. actually driving the car on the road. You can understand the basics but actually driving the car is a completely different experience.

Emotional intelligence can be viewed as a combination of attitude skills, interpersonal communication skills and community building skills.

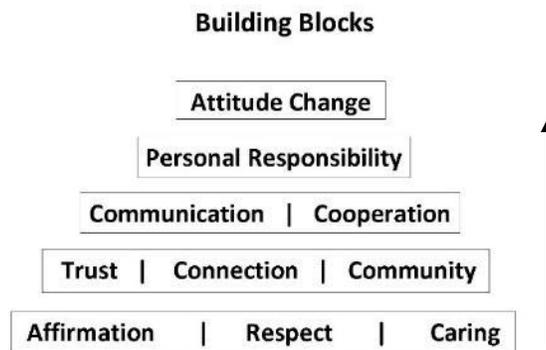
- Attitude skills include:
  - self-awareness
  - empathy; personal responsibility [initiative – what I do matters, integrity and the interconnectedness with others]
  - emotional management
- Interpersonal communication skills include:
  - listening skills
  - assertiveness skills
  - problem solving skills
  - transforming power [prevention and conflict transformation]
- Community-building skills include:
  - trust
  - respect
  - inclusiveness

TACT<sup>®</sup> training includes all of these EQ skills in a holistic approach. The 3 R's of TACT<sup>®</sup> are Relationship, Responsibility and Resilience. Basically, TACT<sup>®</sup> is an EQ inoculation in two or three days. This may seem impossible, but it isn't. Over the past 26 years, many agencies have experienced TACT<sup>®</sup> trainings with remarkable results. The trainings are engaging, energizing, empowering and enjoyable; and agencies find them very effective. Participants rate them 97% positive [77% excellent and 20% very good] and over 80% say they are continuing to use the skills learned over 6 months after the training. Now, we will return to the actual TACT<sup>®</sup> training model.

### **TACT<sup>®</sup> Training; Building Blocks One and Two**

TACT<sup>®</sup> trainings are based on the Immersive Experiential Training<sup>®</sup> design, which incorporates five building blocks.

#### **Teambuilding Attitude Conflict Transformation Trainings**



A foundation of affirmation, respect and caring must be established in the first session. This can be accomplished by engaging participants in experiential interpersonal exercises and not by lecture. The participants need to feel the trainer(s) respects and cares about them as a group and individually and is not just “doing their job.” With this foundation, the participants will feel a sense of safety built on trust, connection and community, which is the second building block. This sense of safety is critically important for many reasons. Participants will comfortably let their barriers down and be more open to seeing themselves honestly, be more open to new ideas and information without being defensive, and connect with others in a positive, reinforcing community with a strong bond. This connection crosses department boundaries improving cooperation and collaboration, especially when trainees are from all ranks and departments. Individuals now feel connected and relationships that have been conflicted often are repaired.

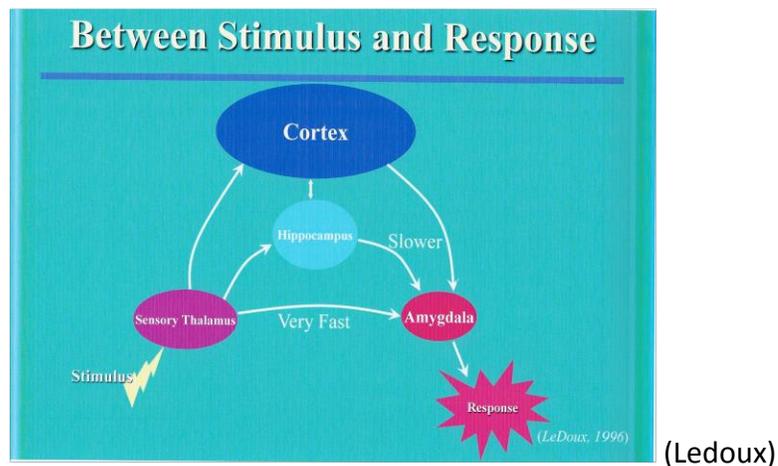
### **The Importance of Connection**

The sense of connection to others is one of our basic human needs. (Shuford, Empowering Pg.32) A frequent and undesirable consequence of working in the field of law enforcement is experiencing a feeling of disconnection from self and others. The high divorce rate is indicative of staff being disconnected from their partners because of not feeling comfortable sharing with them what happens at work every day, and also bringing their “work attitude” home. The feeling that others in the community do not understand law enforcement and may not even respect the profession, only adds to the feeling of isolation and disconnection. Finally, the highly stressed environment of an agency and the “us vs. them” culture encourages staff to disconnect from

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their own emotions so they can be “professional.” The high rates of PTSD [30%] depression [30%] (Spinaris), suicide, addiction and absenteeism (Shuford Missing Pg. 43) all have in common a feeling of isolation or not being connected to others. There may also be a significant problem with moral injury, which can be misdiagnosed as PTSD or depression. Although it has not been researched in law enforcement, the military has researched it and found it is a significant contributor to suicide (Moral).

Psychologically, this chronic stress and disconnection cause decreases in the immune system, emotional management [pre-frontal cortex], empathy, memory and cognitive processing. (Segal Pg.53, 91) Current neuro-science research reveals how the brain responds to stress, as well as to chronic stress. Normal external events are first processed by the sensory thalamus, which is the distribution center in the brain.



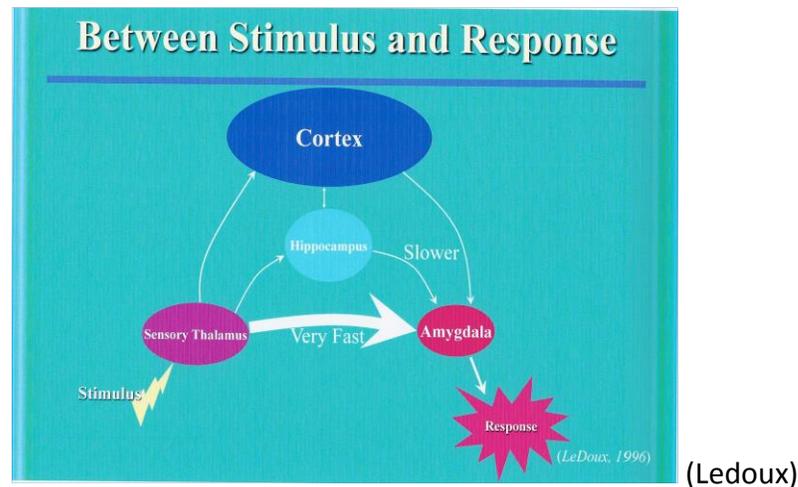
From there it goes to three locations:

1. The amygdala, which is our survival center; the fight or flight center and where fear and anger originate. These neuropathways are very fast.
2. The hippocampus; where the event is put in context with all our life experience. This is where our “world view” resides. These neuropathways are slower.
3. The cortex or neo-cortex; our logical, thinking center where we decide how to respond. These neuropathways are the slowest.

Thus, if a loud noise occurs in the back of the room:

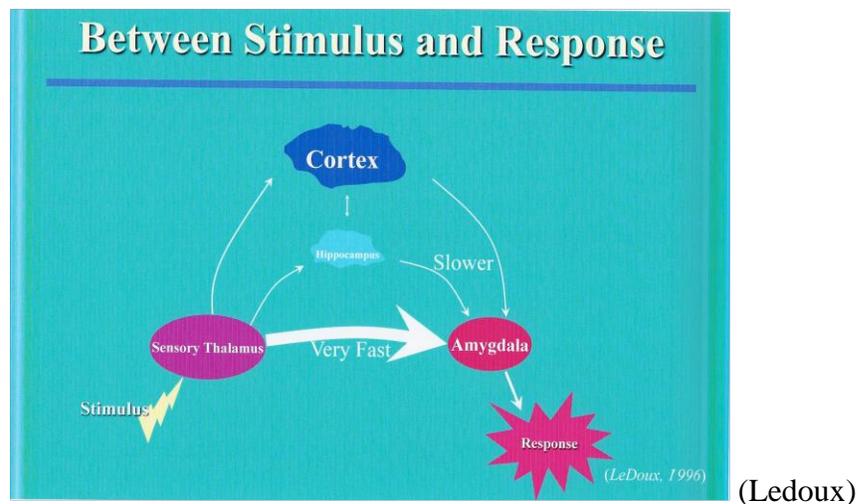
1. Amygdala – we duck or shudder and adrenalin pumps through our body.
2. Hippocampus – we turn to get oriented and see Joe dropped a table and it is not threatening.
3. Neo-cortex – we shout “Joe, will you be more careful.”

When trauma occurs, the neuropathways to the amygdala are activated, but the neuropathways to the hippocampus and neo-cortex are shut down. In an emergency, we don’t think, we react out of fear and or anger.



Thus, the memory is stored in the amygdala, which has no sense of time or context. This is why flashbacks seem as though they are occurring in the present moment with no awareness that the traumatic event occurred at a different time and place. It is experienced as though it is happening here and now. Because the amygdala has no sense of context, the memory is stored as unconnected bits and pieces and not as a complete event. [Note: although trauma therapy is not covered in this chapter, effective trauma therapy integrates the memory into the hippocampus and neo-cortex while quieting the amygdala, so that the memory is stored like any other unpleasant memory.]

If the individual continues to experience trauma, the neuropathways to the amygdala become stronger and those to the hippocampus and neo-cortex become weaker, resulting in the latter two organs actually shrinking in size, making them less effective. The amygdala may be in a constant aroused state resulting in a “new normal” state of high anxiety, which perpetuates this condition.



If one experiences chronic stress, as in the law enforcement setting, the impact on the brain is much the same. Cortisol, which is the chronic stress response chemical in the brain, is continuously released and is toxic not only to the neurological system, but also the immune system, the hormonal system and cardiovascular system as well. (Harris Pg.65) It negatively impacts memory, learning, emotions, motivation and behavior, (Harris Pg. 67) and increases anxiety, arousal and aggression. (Harris Pg.68) It negatively affects concentration, reasoning, judgment, planning and decision making, considering future consequences of current actions, working toward a defined goal and exhibiting social control. (Harris Pg.68) Chronic stress also impacts us physically by “increasing inflammation, hypersensitivity [allergies, eczema, asthma], autoimmune disease [rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, type 1 diabetes, celiac disease, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, Graves disease, multiple sclerosis] (Harris Pg.73) and can impair DNA reproduction damaging organs or uncontrolled growth of cells, as in cancer. (Harris Pg.87)

However, as mentioned earlier, these changes do not have to be permanent. Activities that can reverse these effects are adequate sleep, mental health therapy, developing healthy relationships, meditation, exercise, proper nutrition (Harris Pg.111) and pleasurable activities, like taking a walk in nature (Lexipol), among others. These activities create new neuropathways in the brain, known as neuroplasticity. This would explain the positive results of TACT<sup>®</sup> trainings. When staff actually experience the desired positive work culture within the training, new neuropathways are created, resulting in staff becoming motivated to make the positive changes. That motivation comes from their attitude change and skills learned during the training, giving them hope that change is possible and that they are personally responsible for making changes in themselves. These changes are not temporary and may indicate a lengthening of their telomeres. These new neuropathways are created in the amygdala, hippocampus and neo-cortex.

1. By creating a space of safety, the amygdala is quieted. This is why community building is so essential to TACT<sup>®</sup>.
2. This new experience of safety and trust is registered in the hippocampus resulting in a changed ‘self-view’ and, thus, a changed “world view.”
3. The skills taught give new tools for the neo-cortex.

TACT<sup>®</sup> is a complete package, impacting all three crucial parts of the brain. This is the basis of its transformative quality and its universal applicability. Participants experience a new normal, due in large part to an increase in self-awareness, empathy and personal responsibility. Because participants are more open and less defensive, they experience an awareness of their own innate health, increased self-acceptance and the interconnection with others. Not only do participants connect with their own innate health, but so also do the organizations and groups to which they belong.

### **TACT<sup>®</sup> Training; Building Blocks Three – Five**

Once this sense of safety, connection and community has been created in the training [the second building block], the skills of effective communication and cooperation must be taught, which will give staff the sense of hope that the working culture can actually be changed. This sense of hope is absolutely necessary in order for old established behavioral patterns to change. (Guhigg Pg.85) This third building block incorporates several types of skills. Attitude skills, which

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are self-awareness, empathy, personal responsibility and emotional management. Personal responsibility includes initiative [what I do matters], integrity and interconnectedness with others. The second type is interpersonal skills, which are taught experientially, include listening, assertiveness, problem solving and conflict transformation [resolution and prevention]. The third type of skill is community building skills, such as trust, respect and inclusiveness. Some of these skills are learned through the actual experience of the training and some are specifically taught experientially.

Now that the participants have the tools and have actually experienced the change in culture within the training itself, they will naturally feel empowered and a sense of personal responsibility to make changes in themselves and in their work setting; which is the fourth building block. Surely, they cannot change the work culture in the entire agency, but they certainly can with those whom they work and when enough staff experience this attitude change, work culture transformation gradually takes place.



This process is organic, even with staff who come to this type of training skeptical or even defiant to change. The result of this process is the fifth building block, which is personal transformation. Now staff have the attitude, experience and skills necessary to transform the work culture in the agency. This personal transformation is not temporary. The Philadelphia Prison System reports that six months post training, 82%-85% of staff reported using the skills (Miller) compared with traditional teaching strategies showing a 10%-30% retention rate. (National)

The results of this type of training are remarkable when incorporated in basic orientation and inservice training. Because the intention of this training model is to change attitudes, the impact on staff has been dramatic at work with co-workers, supervisors, inmates and in their personal lives, especially at home. The TACT training pedagogy above has been serving correctional agencies for over 25 years. TACT<sup>®</sup> trainings have helped rebuild an emotionally devastated staff after four staff were brutally murdered by inmates in 2017, healed damaged relationships between departments, transformed and revitalized a dysfunctional training academy, turned an anger prone problem employee into an employee of the year, improved the working cultures in numerous agencies, re-energized a burnt-out 18-year employee, transformed a problem supervisor and reduced employee grievances in one agency to an all-time low.

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Some typical comments from staff are: “This training was life altering. Best I have ever had in my 25 years with the state;” “Not only equipped me to be a better manager, but also a better person;” “I now know how to deal with problems in a different way than I learned in the past;” “I learned to trust when I didn’t think I could;” “Life transforming. I will carry this training for the rest of my career;” “I ask why? Why did this training take twenty-eight years to come into play with the department.” From the director of a training academy, “Words cannot express the value of the training you have conducted at the Academy. There is actually a paradigm shift from the rigidity and inflexibility ingrained in Corrections, to the understanding and acceptance of the value of community and teamwork.” (Personal, Conway) And from a warden, “It is generally thought to be the best training program that staff has participated in. the labor unions are strong supporters of it and employee grievances have dropped to an all time low. Thank you for helping us change the culture at MCI. It is the best investment of resources that we have ever made.” (Personal, Money)

### **Conclusion**

This type of training model is actually an emotional intelligence inoculation and can be easily learned by staff, line staff as well as training academy staff. It can literally raise the EQ of an agency, department or organization. It is what is missing in law enforcement and an antidote for the current staffing shortages. It needs to be part of an overall strategy incorporating policy changes empowering staff to improve themselves, their work performance, their teamwork and the overall culture of the agency. We must address the needs of staff, focus on their wellbeing, or we will lose the most valuable asset we have – our employees. The training academy must be a central player in this process. The training academy is the vehicle by which the desired transformation can occur, and by incorporating emotional intelligence training in its courses, it will greatly enhance its efforts. We need to focus on both the needs of the agency and the needs of staff, not just the needs of the agency. In the short run, they may differ, but in the long run, they are the same.

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