

# Standards & Training DIRECTOR Magazine



## The Critical Role of Academy Directors: Ensuring Effective Training and Accountability for Front-Line Officers and Supervisors

### 3-Exposés on Investigative Communication

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March 2025

Volume 5, Number 1



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## Cover Design:

The front cover is a graphic design provided through Adobe Stock.

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Fifth Volume

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IADLEST, March 2025

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# Beyond Words:

## Advanced Interview Skills for Law Enforcement

**By Joe Auriemma**

Communication is more than a necessary skill in law enforcement; it is a survival tool. Whether conducting a traffic stop, interviewing a victim, witness, or suspect, or managing a volatile confrontation, an officer's ability to connect, interpret, and respond effectively is critical for achieving safe and successful outcomes. Yet, traditional police training often overlooks the basic and nuanced art of communication, leaving officers ill-prepared for their roles' unpredictable and high-stakes demands.

### **The Communication Training Gap**

Despite its importance, communication training remains alarmingly underemphasized in police education. Data from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics reveals that basic training academies allocate far more hours to tactical and technical skills than communication-focused instruction. For example:

- Firearms training averages **60 hours**,
- Defensive tactics training averages **50-60 hours**,
- Emergency vehicle operations training averages **40 hours**.

In contrast, despite recent emphasis, de-escalation training still averages fewer than **20 hours**, and courses explicitly dedicated to communication skills, such as active listening, rapport-building, and nonverbal cue interpretation, often total fewer than **10 hours** if offered.

This disparity highlights the urgent need to prioritize advanced communication training, aligning it on equal footing with core tactical skills to better prepare officers for real-world scenarios.

### **The Power of Nonverbal Communication**

Research shows that nonverbal communication, including body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, and other unspoken cues, accounts for **60-90% of human communication**. In high-pressure environments, an officer's ability to interpret subtle nonverbal signals, such as hesitation, stress indicators, or physical shifts, provides invaluable insight into a subject's mindset and intentions. Mastering this skill can enhance situational awareness, ensure safer interactions, and improve investigative outcomes.

Law enforcement agencies should embrace advanced

communication training that integrates nonverbal communication analysis with evidence-based techniques like personality assessment to address this gap. This powerful combination equips officers to gather reliable information, defuse tense encounters, and navigate complex situations more effectively.

### **Communication Challenges in Modern Policing**

The demands of contemporary policing require officers to excel in communication across various high-stakes situations. Historically, however, the field has relied on an outdated "learn it in the field" approach, where communication skills are assumed to develop passively through observation of senior officers.

With 24 years of law enforcement experience, including over a decade as an Academy instructor and five years as a supervisor, I have witnessed firsthand the significant shortcomings of this unstructured approach. It often leaves officers ill-prepared, forcing them to rely on trial and error in critical moments. Integrating structured, consistent communication training yields measurable improvements across three critical areas.

#### **1. Enhancing Interviews with Victims, Witnesses, and Suspects**

Advanced communication techniques allow officers to gather accurate and reliable information, even from individuals struggling with stress, fear, or fragmented memories. Key strategies include:

- **Open-ended prompts** to encourage free, uninterrupted narratives,
- **Active listening** and summarizing key points to clarify or expand on details.

These approaches can help build trust, demonstrate empathy, and prevent misunderstandings while preserving the integrity of investigations. Officers who employ these techniques often uncover critical details ethically and effectively.

#### **2. De-escalating Volatile Situations**

Integrating advanced communication skills with de-escalation techniques can also enhance an officer's ability to manage tense encounters safely and professionally.

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Integrating advanced communication skills with de-escalation techniques can also enhance an officer's ability to manage tense encounters safely and professionally. Recognizing nonverbal cues, such as defensive posture or agitation, and adapting communication styles allows officers to connect with individuals more effectively.

Understanding a subject's communication preferences, whether they respond better to a calm, measured tone or a firm, directive approach, empowers officers to tailor their interactions. This flexible and empathetic strategy leads to better outcomes, whether engaging with uncooperative suspects, hesitant witnesses, or emotionally charged individuals.

### 3. Detecting Deception and Assessing Credibility

Structured training in nonverbal analysis and evidence-based questioning techniques enables officers to identify inconsistencies and assess credibility confidently. Subtle indicators, such as changes in tone, body language, or baseline behavior, can signal stress or emotions, prompting officers to explore topics more deeply.

Effective strategies, such as strategically introducing evidence during interviews, allow the truthful subject to provide more fine-grained details while prompting deceptive subjects to reveal contradictions. This non-accusatory, professional approach fosters cooperation and minimizes defensiveness.

Replacing the "trial and error" mindset with structured, research-backed training ensures officers can handle these critical interactions with skill, confidence, and professionalism.

### The Role of Scenario-Based Training

While classroom instruction provides foundational knowledge, mastering advanced communication skills requires **realistic, scenario-based training**. By simulating high-pressure environments, officers learn to:

- Build and maintain rapport under varied conditions,
- Rapidly adapt to subjects' communication styles,
- Interpret nonverbal cues to assess emotional states and credibility,
- Apply tailored questioning strategies to gather actionable information.

Role-playing exercises with expert feedback bridge the gap between theory and practice, enhancing knowledge retention and performance under stress. Research consistently supports scenario-based training as a cornerstone of effective law enforcement education.

## A Lifelong Approach to Communication Training

Communication training must evolve from being treated as supplementary to becoming a core component of law enforcement education. From the academy to retirement, officers should receive ongoing, progressive training tailored to their roles:

- **Recruits** must develop foundational skills in nonverbal communication and adaptive strategies,
- **Detectives, supervisors, and command staff** should focus on advanced interrogation techniques, crisis management, and leadership communication.

By embedding communication training throughout an officer's career, agencies equip their personnel to manage the complexities of modern policing with confidence, ethical rigor, and professionalism.

### Beyond Words: A Practical Training Solution

Advanced Strategic Communications has developed the **Beyond Words** course to address this critical need. This one-day training program equips law enforcement professionals with:

- Tools to interpret nonverbal cues,
- Techniques for personality assessment,
- Adaptive communication strategies for any situation.

Through group exercises and scenario-based learning, participants leave with practical, field-ready skills that improve officer safety, enhance investigative outcomes, and build community trust.

### Conclusion

Effective communication is the foundation of successful policing. Advanced communication techniques go **beyond words**, empowering officers to connect, adapt, and respond with precision. By prioritizing structured, evidence-based training, agencies can transform their officers' ability to manage high-stakes interactions safely and effectively.

These skills are not optional; they are essential. They are the tools that define modern policing, ensuring officers serve their communities with professionalism, empathy, and confidence. ~

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Joseph Auriemma, Jr., CFI, INCI, has over twenty-four years of experience with the New York State Police, retiring as a Senior Investigator. In this role, he supervised all criminal investigations conducted by the five Investigators and twenty-five uniform Troopers at his station.



Throughout his tenure with the New York State Police, Joseph worked as a uniform Trooper and a “backroom” investigator; he spent two years assigned to a Child Advocacy Center conducting investigations into crimes against children and worked six years in the Major Crimes Unit investigating homicides, suspicious deaths, and other serious crimes. Joseph spent seventeen years within the Bureau of Criminal Investigations, conducting thousands of interviews and interrogations, making substantial contributions to the investigations and their successful prosecutions.

Joseph has been a certified polygraph examiner since 2015 and was one of two Regional Coordinators overseeing the New York State Police Polygraph Unit. Joseph was the lead instructor at the New York State Police Academy for Investigative Interviewing, Crisis Negotiation, and the Basic and Advanced Search Warrant courses. In May 2019, Joseph received the George M. Searle Memorial Award, an award presented to individuals who have distinguished themselves in training and education within the State Police.

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### IADLEST Model Standards for POST Administration

Revised February 2022

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**It is in the spirit of growth and responsiveness that the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards & Training have resolved to establish a set of Model Standards to which all states may aspire.**

**“No one is compelled to choose the profession of a police officer, but having chosen it, everyone is obligated to live up to the standard of its requirements.”**