SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1a

LENGTH: 1671 words

HEADLINE: Thin Blue Line's Golden Rule Verbal Judo Teaches Police How to Defuse Confrontations

BYLINE: ROBERT NELSON

SOURCE: WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

DATELINE: New York

BODY:

You pull over a rough-looking biker for speeding and ask for his license, and he calls you a pig and says your mother is ugly.

What do you do?

It's the second day of Mike Manley's seminar, so the 80 employees of the New York City Parks Enforcement Patrol know where he is going with this question. They know you don't swear at the biker and say worse things about his mother. That's verbal karate.

Instead, you use verbal judo. You deflect the hostility with an "I appreciate that, sir, but..." And then you counterattack with calm, professional, respectful language aimed at quickly understanding a situation and peacefully persuading those involved into voluntary compliance.

Of course, that's much easier said than done. It's tough, Manley said, to rewire how the human brain deals with confrontation, particularly when that brain is clouded with prejudices.

Beginning Monday, Manley, a retired New York City police officer, will spend a month training 750 Omaha police officers, command staff members and office employees in verbal judo, an increasingly popular technique among law-enforcement agencies for handling interactions between police and citizens.
The training, which Manley and other verbal judo instructors have presented to more than 800 police departments nationwide, will cost the Omaha department nearly $28,000.

Although the Omaha City Council approved the money unanimously, Council President Frank Brown and Councilman Cliff Herd did question the program’s viability.

"If it's an effective tool in calming situations, I support it," Herd said last week. "I just want to make sure police management follows through and makes sure the officers are using it. I'd like to see it integrated in training."

Of eight NYPD officers informally interviewed on the streets of Manhattan, five said they had taken verbal judo classes. Three of the five said the classes were worthwhile. The other two said the classes were pretty much common sense.

"If you were raised right, you learned this stuff from your parents," said an officer in Battery Park City who spoke on the condition he not be identified. "It's just about treating people right. I guess it didn't do any harm."

Other law-enforcement officials nationwide are more enthusiastic.

"It was excellent training for police officers in learning to defuse potentially physical confrontations," said Ardyce Highley, a 29-year veteran of the Independence (Mo.) Police Department, the department Omaha Police Chief Don Carey ran before coming to Omaha. "We plan to continue using it for a long time."

For the past two years, verbal judo has been taught at the Western Missouri Regional Police Academy in Kansas City, Mo., which trains police officers from numerous cities around Kansas City.

"Mike Manley is fantastic," said Richard Gentles, who oversees the 250 employees of the New York Parks Enforcement Patrol and says he has seen a marked decline in citizen complaints since implementing verbal judo five years ago. "What he teaches even works on New Yorkers."

When he became Omaha's police chief in August, Carey said one of his top priorities was implementing verbal judo. He said he thinks the new policing technique will help improve relations between the police and residents.

Verbal judo works, he said. His officers used it in Independence. Officers under him in Blacksburg, Va., where Carey was credited with reducing tensions between police and minority groups, learned similar techniques, he said.

"The more our officers are trained in de-escalating situations, the less incidents there will be in which force is used," he said. "Less force translates into less tension."

Verbal judo, the brainchild of ex-police officer and ex-professor George Thompson of Albuquerque, N.M., reduces deaths and injuries, Carey and other proponents say. It reduces complaints. It reduces bad press.

Manley presented his seminar in New York City last month, a low point of relations between New Yorkers and their police. On this Monday, the police shooting earlier in the month of an unarmed and innocent immigrant was already known around town simply as "the Diallo killing." Forty-one shots, 19 wounds, one dead man.
Manley, a national director for the Verbal Judo Institute in New Mexico, spent 23 years with the NYPD. In a room of police officers, that translates to credibility.

When he role-plays, he plays up the hard-boiled NYPD stereotype. He rifles off New York street lingo, New York gallows humor and dazzles even this New York audience with his virtuosity with foul language.

"I'm not asking you to be nice," he says with a nasal schoolmarm voice.

He is asking you to learn to be so professional that you will always act nice.

Acting empathetic while using professional language aimed at generating compliance is how you save yourself from stress, suspension or death, he says.

You show respect to everyone. Showing disrespect forces a man or woman into a position of having to defend his or her honor. If you take a person's pride, intentionally or, through ignorance of other cultures, unintentionally, that person will fight to get it back.

Respect, though, doesn't mean you give ground, Manley says.

An officer is in this situation to gain voluntary compliance. As an officer, you should get compliance 100 percent of the time, he says.

For this, Manley takes his group back on the road with the motorcyclist.

First, he says, the officer must "know thyself." You must know your hot buttons ("Nobody makes fun of my mommy!"). You must master your hot buttons so that no one else can push them ("Ah, another guy attacking the uniform").

One way is to mentally shift into what Manley calls an officer's "professional self." A police officer is egoless; his job is only to generate voluntary compliance with the law.

You train yourself not to react with "natural language," but to react only with professional language. You listen only to relevant information. But you act as though you're listening respectfully to everything. You then direct the conversation back to your professional goals, even if the biker says your mom is ugly.

"I appreciate that, but that does not change the fact I need to see your license," Manley says, pretending to be the officer with the biker.

First you ask. If the person does not comply, you set the context.

"Sir, may I please see your license? May I remind you that you have an obligation according to the traffic laws of the State of New York to produce a driver's license upon request of a police officer?"

If he does not comply, you give options. Good ones first, bad ones last.

"If you can produce your license, you're looking at a $20 summons (for speeding) and you're on your way. This way you can enjoy the beautiful weather we're having this afternoon, find some nice country roads upstate, find a Holiday Inn, get yourself some Budweiser and watch that ballgame," Manley continues, hamming it up.
"But let me be very clear with you, sir. If I cannot get your cooperation, there are some negative consequences, which would include: going home with me, eating with me, sleeping with me. It's called jail, sir. No Budweiser, no game. ..."

"Can I get your cooperation?"

Manley breaks the class into groups. They are told to act out scenarios in which parks officers must confront citizens.

New York's new "zero tolerance" leash law was a favorite topic. Parks employees must give tickets to owners of unleashed dogs, which has made for some irate dog owners.

The role-playing helps demonstrate how difficult it is for officers to keep their composure when being verbally attacked. Even in these make-believe scenarios, several officers become flustered and essentially ineffective.

Verbal judo must be practiced, Manley says. It must become a mental script. As with martial arts, you must practice moves until they become instinctive.

Ask for compliance, set context, present options, confirm and then, if met with noncompliance, act.

"In the worst-case scenario, this may become compressed into a few seconds," he tells the class. "Sir, please put down that gun. Sir, please put down that gun for your safety and my safety. Sir, please put down that gun...POPO!" The officer fires.

But, Manley says, if the incident is taken to a grand jury, witnesses will testify - unlike witnesses in the Amadou Diallo or Rodney King cases - that the officer did everything he could in the most professional and respectful manner possible to persuade the man or woman to stop placing his life in imminent danger.

"At these moments, you have the most difficult job in the world. You must be absolutely prepared to do an absolutely perfect job under the most extreme pressure. Welcome to police work."

Those involved in the seminar said they felt better prepared to deal more effectively with the public.

"This stuff is invaluable," said Jill Cohen, a mounted patrol officer in Central Park who had taken a previous course taught by Manley. "I've used it, I've tried to make it the foundation of how I interact with the public. Trust me, it works."

Manley hopes that verbal judo, already taught to new NYPD officers, will become more deeply integrated in department policy.

That has happened in other cities such as Los Angeles, where verbal judo training began following the videotaped beating of Rodney King.

If this month's training proves successful, Carey said, verbal judo will become an integral part of how Omaha police officers handle confrontations. Carey said he hopes to integrate verbal judo into training at the Omaha police academy.

"The genesis of all this is to improve response, and from that flows less conflict," Carey said. "If verbal
judo can help us reach that goal, it is going to a big part of what we do."

GRAPHIC: Color Photo/1 PEACEFUL PERSUASION: Retired New York Police Officer Mike Manley says verbal judo consists of five steps: Ask for compliance, set context, present options, confirm and then, if met with noncompliance, act. -PHID- 881269,; ROBERT NELSON/WORLD-HERALD/1sf

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: April 5, 1999