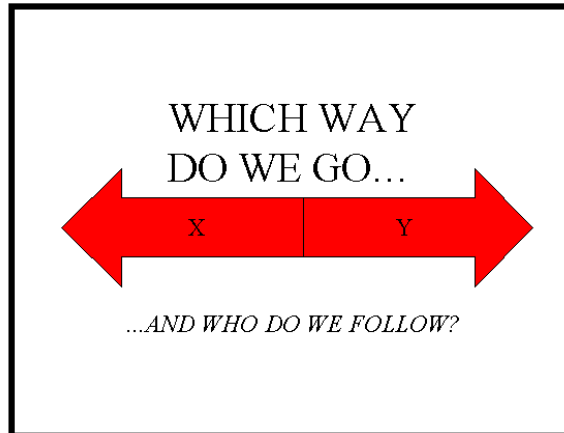


# Training Day

By Charles bailey for tinhelmet  
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Training Day was a pretty good movie; it earned Denzel Washington the Oscar. In this movie it was pretty ambiguous just who the good guy was, all the characters operated in this grey area between good and bad, between right and wrong. They were all conflicted, at least the major players, all trying to get to the “right” but going about in ways that required rationalization of morality. The important part

of this story though, is that Denzel’s character and the Ethan Hawke character both were after different versions of what was right and in the end that led to conflict, death and confusion.

The other day there was a multiple casualty incident that in the end stretched for miles, involved two counties and three police jurisdictions. The final major crash occurred right on the County line and well that is where competing issues of what is right came into play.

I refer to this call as training day for three reasons:

- #1- It was an unplanned cross jurisdictional, multiple casualty incident with non-compatible radio systems.
- #2- There were multiple simultaneous significant incidents.
- #3- There were violent actors involved.

*(Sounds like a terrorist incident maybe?)*

If there ever was a training day for “the big one” this was it. A quiet Sunday afternoon where a series of car crashes turns out to be part of a regional event. It was a long time before we realized that all the pieces were connected, it was a long time before we got our act together. There are lessons to be derived from this incident and they are lessons better learned and incorporated into action today rather than as part of the congressional inquiry that follows the “big one.

## **Background-**

A car jacking occurs in County X. The County X police are chasing the bad guys and they crash. This is incident one and it results on two traumatically injured patients. The chase continues onto an interstate where three more people are injured, one critically. Finally in County Y the chase ends with a grand finale of a crash that involved at least eight vehicles and eight patients, one trapped in the vehicle. The bad guy got away.

## **The Breakdown-**

It was an unplanned cross-jurisdictional, multiple casualty incident with non-compatible radio systems.

First of all there was a contingency in place that would have allowed for the patching o the two radio systems together but that contingency was not exercised. This failure led to two jurisdictional entities trying to control units from two counties on two different radio systems. Imagine if you would the confusion that resulted here. This problem was compounded by the fact that an officer from County Y where the last crash occurred was on the scene first and initiated the command sequence. A chief officer from county X arrived, assumed command, but did not incorporate the actions of the initial IC into his action plan. This failure led to a duplication of effort and to some missed critical misses.

There are lessons to be learned here. This was the second time that morning I heard an officer assume command of an incident without consulting the initial incident commander. In both cases vital information was lost because of an inadequate transfer of command. In general a bad move.

I used to take command that way myself until a pal and fellow chief officer pointed out that my ego was getting in the way of my common sense. Subsequent conversations with other chief officers have led me to the following conclusion. A chief officer must take command from a unit officer, because that only makes sense, however that chief really should, actually must, take the time to get an update from the initial incident commander. The corollary to that is that Chief Officers should refrain from transferring command amongst each other unless it is necessary and justifiable. In short if the other guy or gal ain't messing up just leave them be! I will admit that this is hard on the ego but it is also necessary to ensure smooth and effective operations. I will need to work on this one myself as I so enjoy uttering the words "I have the command."

The incident involved a mass casualty, by strict definition, with at least eight patients. The efforts of the initial triage officer were lost in the command transfer. The second IC gave the EMS function to someone else. That work was duplicated unnecessarily. The point is if the command transfer had been a little smoother we would not have had so much work to do, twice.

Another problem is that resources were being summoned from both County X and County Y simultaneously and in duplication. This is obviously not a good thing.

This incident also bares another weakness. What if this was a terrorist incident unfolding. It occurred on the line between two counties. It was difficult to put the pieces together, to connect the dots in one jurisdiction never the less two. I don't know what the answer is but I suspect that the next big one is not going to be like 9-11 but rather a series of smaller events occurring at the same time. I don't know the answer but I wonder how we will be able to put those pieces together in a timely fashion. We ought to think about that sooner rather than later.

### **The Next Time-**

The fire next time... After this incident we were able to wipe our brows. There were some foul-ups but with only eight patients we were able to get through this one. Imagine if it was series of bus bombings along the county line with hundreds of people hurt? What then. It would not have been enough to fudge our way through we would need to have a codified method for managing these incidents that we practice on a regular basis.

We cannot afford to have miscommunications on the big one, we cannot afford to have dual requests for resources during the big one, and we cannot afford to have duplication of effort on the big one. If we plan to win the fire department equivalent of the Oscar we can only afford to execute the plan that has been vetted by real life experiences such as the one we had on the last training day.

So how do we do it? Well those who were involved in this one should sit down and talk through what happened. We should examine existing plans and contingencies to see if they are realistic and effective, and we should have a real heart to heart about where command begins and egos end.

*\*As a note...I am sure that there are some who were at the same scene who have completely different memories about what happened. It is not that one of us is lying it is that we perceived the events differently. I can only tell the story the way I saw it and as usual invite all participants to write back and share your story. I know each and every one of the people involved and have great respect for them as people and as commanders. However, I know an apple when I see one and when I see an apple I don't call it an orange. No matter how you saw it we could have done a better job at managing these scenes at the very least and maybe (but I am not so sure) at putting the puzzle pieces together and realizing that we were dealing with one big event and not a bunch of smaller ones. If we never stop to learn how these things unfold we will never get it right. Pattern recognition is the key here and one of us should have realized based on our knowledge of the local roadways and paths of travel that these events might have been connected somehow. Anyway if anyone is offended you are looking at it the wrong way. ...this is my story and I am sticking to it!*

