

K.I.S.S. It: Keeping it Simple

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Sometimes we all need a humbling experience to teach us something. I'm sharing this piece because I'm quite sure there are other experienced and passionate IPMBA Instructors who can stand to learn this lesson themselves. It is better learned sooner than later.

I had my revelation last spring while teaching an IPMBA Police Cyclist Course. It was a rather large class and it required three PCIs to teach it. Assisting me were two PCIs with vastly different cycling and bike patrol experience. One was older, with a great passion for biking and fitness. He had been a road cyclist and racer for a number years prior to getting involved with bike patrol. The second was a younger officer and new instructor. He had the same enthusiasm for teaching bike patrol officers, but considerably less teaching and cycling experience from which to draw.

During the class, our younger team member gave several presentations. They were each presented well. His material was straight from the IPMBA PC lesson plan. The information was complete, but there wasn't much "extra" information added that went over and above the material in the lesson plan. Unlike we "old-timers" whose experience and passion had us delving much deeper into some of the topics, the "rookie" pretty much stuck to the book and the lesson plan. As I listened, I thought, "there is much more to add if we want to make these students as knowledgeable and passionate as we are!"

At the end of the week, the required course and instructor evaluations were collected from the students. To our surprise, the rookie PCI got the highest evaluations from the group. He was deemed easier to understand and had an overall better attitude. All three of us were somewhat taken aback at the results. It started an after-class discussion among the instructors as to why the evaluations were as they were. While some of the points were unique to that group and the weather conditions during the class, some could be applied to all basic training courses.

The greatest lesson I learned was to remind myself before and during every basic course that it is just that: a basic course. We want to teach them skills and information that will enable them to more effectively and safely perform basic public safety tasks using a bicycle. Students often attend because they are told to be there. Most don't have a passion for cycling, nor do they have any expectation of ever being an expert. They seek basic riding skills and enough cognitive information to enable them to pass the tests at the end of the course, which will keep the brass at work happy. The IPMBA course lesson plans provide them with all that is required to meet that standard and pass the tests. It has proven to be a basic but very comprehensive training program.

During my career, I attended a number of police-specific instructor courses. Quite often I would hear the acronym K.I.S.S. It means *Keep It Simple, Stupid, or Keep It Splendidly Simple*. Never before had those words been more meaningful. In our passion for the topic, and our desire to make the students the best, most knowledgeable bike officers we could, we were actually having nearly the opposite effect!

I realized complexity has several effects. First, the information becomes too much to absorb and understand in a 4 to 5 day class. Secondly, when students become overloaded, some start to "tune out" and daydream. At that point the instructor has lost them. Next, when information gets too involved, many adult learners start wondering how it could possibly be useful to them. As

experienced bike officers we may know that it is valuable, but the novice public safety cyclist has a difficult time comprehending how that extra information will be valuable. I have been known to refer to these added techniques or information as “extra tools for the toolbox.” In reality we need to give students the most vital tools for a very basic, easy-to-use toolbox.

Last, and certainly not least, is the impression students may get of their instructor. Some may perceive an instructor’s fervent passion as the instructor simply showing off, or bragging about how smart or experienced they are. Taken to an extreme, they may even perceive it as arrogance or “attitude.” That may not be the instructor’s intent, but it may indeed be the student’s perception. A letter from Allan Howard, Past IPMBA Chairman, and PCI #001, found in the beginning of the IPMBA Instructor Manual reminds IPMBA instructors of the importance and value of humility. *“Even though your skills are of the highest quality, be humble. Humility allows students to believe they, too, can do what’s being demonstrated; it is also an admirable trait...”* If you have never read the whole letter, do so. It’s a valuable lesson for all of us.

Occasionally an instructor will encounter a student with a passion for cycling or bike patrol near equal to their own. That student will ask questions and seek out more information and techniques. This is an opportunity to share what you know to help make that unique student all that they can be. That student may well be the next person you recommend for IPMBA Instructor candidacy. Those students may be rare in a basic course. IPMBA offers both intermediate and advanced level courses for those who seek more tools for their toolbox. It is also a great thing to add to in-service training for those already trained in the basics.

The lesson I learned was an important one. I have found greater success and satisfaction while teaching basic courses since I began reminding myself to *keep things simple*. Fighting the urge to go beyond the lesson plan may require constant self-reminders, but doing so will make you a better instructor and will actually enable your students to better perform and understand the basic skills you want them to learn in the first place.

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