

10-Minute Training exercises improve decision-making & communications through deliberate practice.

BY ED HARTIN

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Firefighting is not warfighting. However imperfect the comparison, there are many lessons the fire service can learn from the military. In "The Evolution of Revolt," British Army Colonel T.E. Lawrence (aka, Lawrence of Arabia) wrote: "Nine-tenths of tactics are certain and taught in books, but the irrational tenth is like the kingfisher flashing across the pool, and that is the test of generals. It can only be ensured by instinct, sharpened by thought, practicing the stroke so often that, at the crisis, it is as natural as a reflex."

Deliberate practice is a goal-oriented activity that requires focused attention and effort to tackle challenging tasks. The Blue Card program relies heavily on deliberate practice, starting with online training, progressing to the certification lab, and then through continuing education. What other opportunities are available for incident commanders to expand their experience and refine their skills?

When firefighters or fire officers watch a video of another agency's (or another shift's) incident operations, they are quick to critique their actions. Viewing pre-arrival videos or incident photographs may prompt ideas about how they would respond to a similar event. Rather than simply watching these videos or looking at a picture, we can harness an opportunity to engage in deliberate practice, reinforcing essential strategic and tactical decision-making skills and the communications protocols required to deliver an incident action plan.

The U.S. Marine Corps uses *tactical decision games (TDGs)* to develop tactical decision-making and communication skills. These exercises place individuals in the role of a commander facing a tactical problem with limited time and information, requiring them to formulate and communicate an action plan via orders.

TDGs are easily adaptable for our training. In my department, we use Ten-Minute Training to practice the tactical skills and decision-making necessary to serve as IC No. 1. Below is a brief overview of the process; [please click here](#) for a fully detailed example of a 10-Minute Training scenario. Use it as a template to create similar trainings for your department's unique response area.

1. Provide initial dispatch information, including details regarding the building and its location. Prompt participants acting as IC No. 1 to consider which critical factors come to mind and the conversations they would have with their crews en route to the scene.

2. Provide arrival information, ideally including a pre-arrival video or photo of incident conditions. Task participants with delivering an IRR and orders to their crew members, clarifying individual actions.

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3. Next, provide additional information about conditions not visible in the video or photos but discovered during the 360.

4. IC No. 1 should next issue tactical orders, including a task, location and objective to the later-arriving companies as they Level 1 stage. Once these companies are assigned, a command officer arrives and initiates a command transfer. IC No. 1 provides a CAN report (conditions, actions and needs) as part of this process based on the expected impact of their tactical operations.

Additional Guidelines for 10-Minute Training

Time constraints. IC No. 1 should take only 10 minutes to answer questions related to their company, the second-arriving company, and command transfer—realistically, this is about the time they'd have on the fireground. They should complete this without discussion.

Limited information. Participants won't have all the information they might want during a 10-minute training, and on the fireground, they would likely have even less and face greater ambiguity.

Radio communication. Once IC No. 1 has addressed the critical factors in their initial response, all further communication should follow standard Blue Card radio protocols.

Decide, then discuss. Discussion happens after the command transfer. Use this time to review responses, evaluate strategy, the incident action plan, and the clarity of communications. **BS**



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4 Benefits of 10-Minute Training

1. Flexible Application—10-minute Training can be used as a structured training activity or informally as a quick drill based on an interesting fire photo or incident video. For example, "Give me your IRR," or "State the tactical assignment you would give the next company."

2. Individual or Group Use—This training can be used for individuals to develop personal decision-making and communication skills or in a group, where it helps build common understanding and provides broader feedback on performance.

3. Communication Focus—Participants often want to explain rather than give orders to their crew or other companies. It's essential to focus on communicating the IRR, follow-up report, orders to companies, and the CAN report before moving into discussion.

4. Discussion Starter—10-minute Training can also serve as a starting point for task-level discussions with firefighters and apparatus operators, focusing on how they would respond to an assignment from IC No. 1. This approach promotes shared understanding across the team.