**You are Now a Canine Supervisor; Now What?**

Assuming the role of a Canine Supervisor in law enforcement is a challenging responsibility, filled with unique trials and rewards. Suppose you have previous experience as a canine handler and understand proper canine deployments well. In that case, you are more likely to acclimate quickly to your new role. Suppose you are an experienced supervisor with limited or no direct exposure to canine operations. In that case, you will be faced with additional but surmountable challenges. In either case, the successful headway you make in your new role will be significantly influenced by how hard you are willing to work and your ability to look at your supervisory decisions from different points of view.

As a canine supervisor, you must be responsible for providing support to not only the handler but the canine itself while it is at home and work, provide resources to ensure proper training is delivered, while making sure your unit mission is balanced with the expectations of executive leadership and community expectations. Because canine teams have law enforcement’s only tool that literally leads officers directly to resistive suspects, canine officers face some of law enforcement’s greatest day-to-day safety risks. With greater officer safety risk comes added liability exposure. As a result, canine supervisors must meet law enforcements most serious and intricate supervisory demands. As a leader overseeing police canine teams, your influence is essential in ensuring the safe, effective, and **EFFICIENT Deployment** of K9 teams.

A solid foundation for any successful police canine program is built upon a comprehensive set of **POLICIES.** As a newly appointed Canine Supervisor, your first task is to understand the K9 policy and remain accountable to it thoroughly. This includes enforcing the policy, regularly discussing case law concerning police canine deployments with handlers, and covering critical areas such as appropriate use of force and varied deployment procedures. Conduct timely post-bite assessments for administrative review of the bite, evaluating policy adherence, the effectiveness of the Police Service Dog (PSD), and identifying training needs. It's also crucial to conduct timely debriefs of K9 deployments within the unit, allowing everyone to benefit from the lessons learned and effectively address any issues. Although rarely observed, such best practices are essential for the program's success.

Understanding and operating within these policies and laws will help ensure that the K9 teams under your supervision operate within **LEGAL AND ETHICAL** boundaries. Since community and legal expectations constantly evolve. It's crucial to stay updated on any policy or law revisions to maintain effectiveness within the unit.

Instead of relying solely on certification training, incorporate **REALISTIC AND DYNAMIC** scenarios that mimic the challenges officers might encounter in the field. This hands-on approach helps handlers develop practical skills essential for deployment and certification. If training reveals performance limits, ensure handlers deploy within those limits even as subsequent training further develops the K9 Teams' skill sets.

**PROVIDE HANDLERS WITH THE SKILLS** to adapt to various scenarios and deploy their canines effectively in high-stress situations. Training should emphasize quick decision-making and the ability to adjust strategies on the fly. Ensure handlers train and deploy in a manner consistent with the rest of the department.

**TRAIN** your handlers to be highly aware of their surroundings and to assess situations rapidly. This includes recognizing potential threats, evaluating the safety of civilians, and making informed decisions based on the circumstances at hand. Because canine deployments are de facto tactical operations, you must select only the most highly qualified people and dogs. Handlers should be fit and have exceptional performance records with demonstrated decision-making and de-escalation skills. Dogs should have a stable temperament, robust structure, ample working drives, and a confident demeanor. If handlers lack a dedicated trainer, your role as the Canine Supervisor becomes even more critical in ensuring the competency and effectiveness of the K9 unit. **EXPLORE PARTNERSHIPS** with external organizations or agencies specializing in police canine training.

**SEND HANDLERS** to relevant workshops, seminars, or training courses conducted by recognized experts in the field. Share information with other canine units. Learn what works for other canine units and what does not—debrief canine deployments with others and learn how to improve. Know the K-9 industry standards and how to apply them to your unit. Never stop learning. Maintain detailed records of each handler's training progress, achievements, and areas for improvement. This documentation serves as a valuable tool to track the effectiveness of the training program and make informed decisions regarding adjustments or additional support.

**COMMUNICATE** with higher authorities within the law enforcement agency to advocate for dedicated resources and mission-critical training time. Highlight the importance of investing in proper training to enhance the overall effectiveness and safety of the K9 team.

Encourage a **CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** within the unit. Motivate handlers to stay updated on the latest techniques, legal considerations, and best practices in canine handling. Provide opportunities for handlers to attend conferences or events related to police canine operations.

Police canine supervisors, addressing **HANDLERS NOT ADHERING TO RULES OR HIGH STANDARDS** requires a comprehensive approach. Open communication is vital, ensuring handlers understand expectations and providing opportunities for them to express concerns. Document performance issues, offer additional training, and establish a mentorship or improvement plan. Regular check-ins, supervisory intervention, and peer reviews can guide progress. If problems persist, consider disciplinary actions in line with department policies. The goal is to help handlers improve, maintain unit standards, and enhance overall law enforcement effectiveness.

**USPCA Best Practices Group**

The United States Police Canine Association (USPCA) Best Practices Group is a specialized section within the USPCA This group focuses on developing, maintaining, and promoting best practices in the use, training, and deployment of police canines in law enforcement.