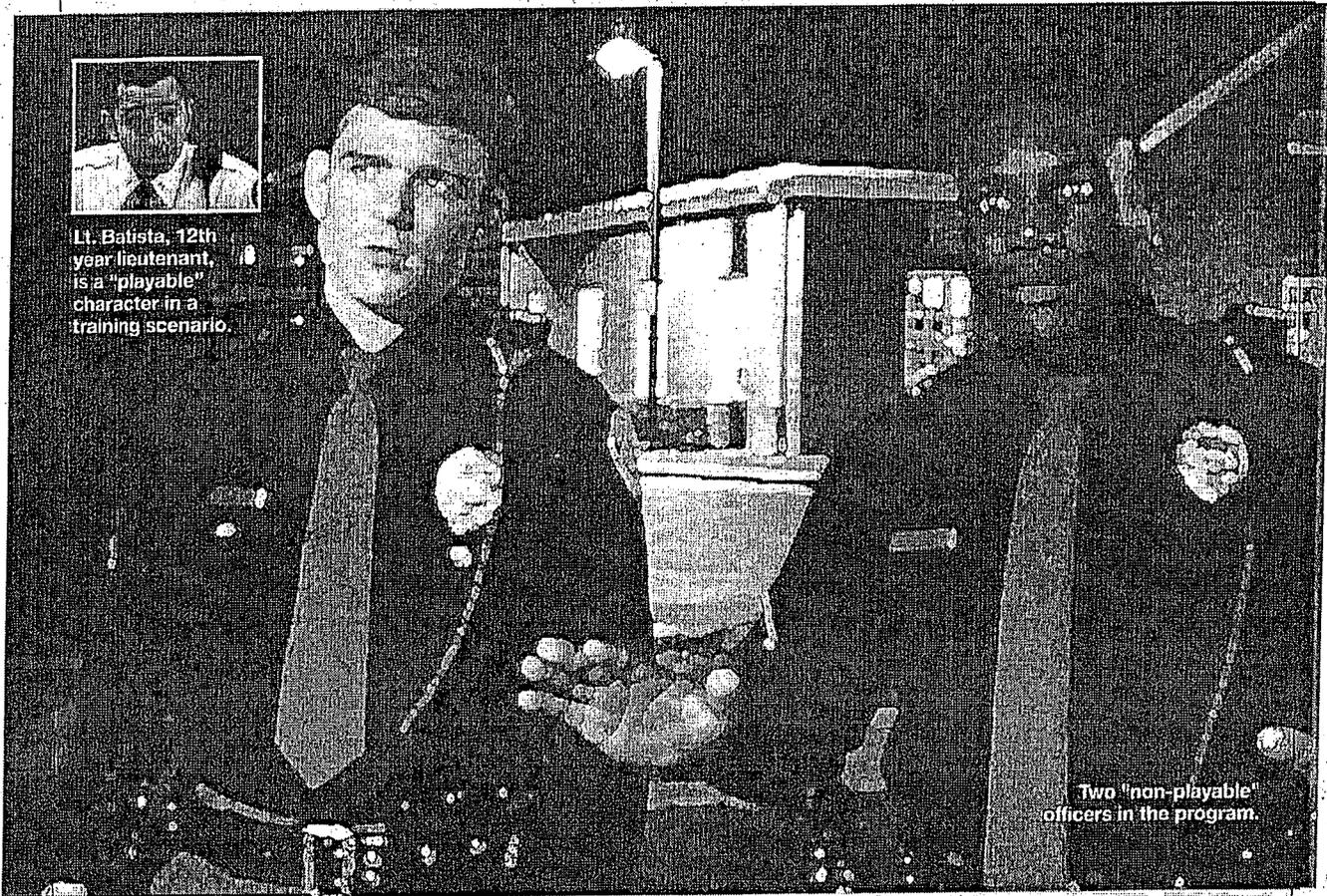## TRAINING TECHNOLOGY
By Donna Rogers

WILL Interactive helps trainees "play it out before they live it out"

Lt. Batista, 12th year lieutenant, is a "playable" character in a training scenario.

Two "non-playable" officers in the program.

"People don't fail to learn because they don't understand; they don't learn because they are not engaged in what they are doing," says Sharon Sloane, co-founder of a training firm that creates real-life situations on interactive digital media. In fact, people learn 20 percent of what they hear, 40 percent of what they see, and 90 percent of what they see, hear and do, according to behavioral experts.

Often what people say they'll do in a certain situation, and what they actually do are very different, continues Sloane. That's because if you ask a trainee to

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make a decision in a sterile environment, nuances of real life are not considered in the response. It is important to immerse students in situations that create educable moments in which they are open to changing attitudes and behaviors. With use of screenwriting and creative re-enactments, Potomac, Maryland-based WILL Interactive Inc. fosters these critical moments.

Chief Operating Officer Lyn McCall, a former Marine Corps colonel with 15 years of modeling and simulation experience with the Department of Defense, and business partner, Sloane, a 20-year veteran of mental

The name of this character is Krystal, a 5th year corporal.

Officer Tyson, 2nd year officer, is another "playable" character in the training scenarios.

health/medical education, joined forces to create a program described as a cross between a feature film and video game. Jeff Hall, the company's chief creative officer, a writer and producer for both stage and video, shares the patent with Sloane for the Interactive Behavior Modification System upon which WILL Interactive's software is built.
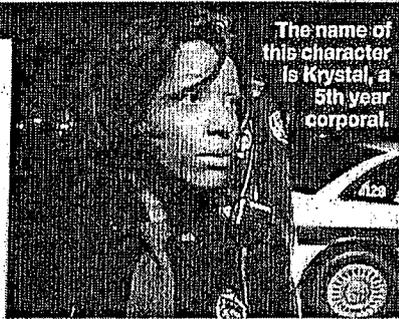
The company's patented Digital Game-Based Learning Approach is known as virtual experience interactive learning software (VEILS). The staff has produced a series of CD-ROM programs addressing 14 topics relating to law enforcement, military, bias crime prevention, youth violence and substance abuse, among others. All incorporate the company's patented Interactive Behavior Modification System that exploits technology as a vehicle to immerse students into simulated, real-time, slice-of-life, full-motion video learning scenarios.
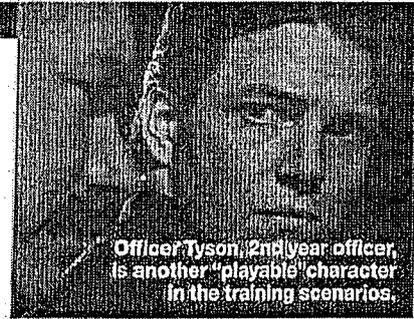
Video titles

The company has produced a range of CD-ROMs for a variety of industries, including education, government and law enforcement. Customers include the Anti-Defamation League; Joint Chiefs of Staff; U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force; Partnership for a Drug-Free America, the Department of Defense and the FBI, as well as hundreds of schools and universities.

Topics intended for a specific customer often cover open-ended issues that are transferable to broader audiences. For instance, a segment on terrorism produced for federal law enforcement has wide appeal and can be later licensed by local law enforcement.

"The Incident," designed for the law enforcement community by the FBI Crisis Negotiation Unit, puts the trainee in charge of a hostage negotiation at a domestic violence incident. Through use of realistic language and depiction of complex situations, WILL Interactive reports it is "a serious learning tool for anyone in law enforcement, from experienced negotiators to rookie line officers."

Another title for law enforcement called "Perspectives on Profiling: Effective Policing Tool or Weapon of Bias?" focuses on the sensitive ethical issues and nuances surrounding the debate of racial profiling. This training tool helps officers differentiate criminal profiling from racial profiling. It addresses the danger of "reverse" racial profiling, that is, officers who abandon intuitive skills out of fear of reprisals for bias, as well as the trend to avoid sensitive subjects, again to avoid racial profiling accusations. This particular software program was developed though an alliance between the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance's Tools for Tolerance for Law Enforcement; a firm called Strategic Business Ethics Inc., which consults to a variety of public sector and government agencies; and WILL Interactive.

"Interactive Nights Out 1" assists 17 to 25 year olds in making smart choices regarding AIDS/HIV, pregnancy, alcohol and other drugs. A segment developed for the Anti-Defamation League titled "Hate Comes Home" focuses on the prevention of hate crimes. It targets high school students, but could carry over into other domains. Also for students, "Just 2 Days" outlines a conflict in a high school that leads to a shooting. Students are asked to make decisions to alter the outcome. Screening of these programs are appropriate for community "Youth Nights Out," frequently sponsored by police agencies.
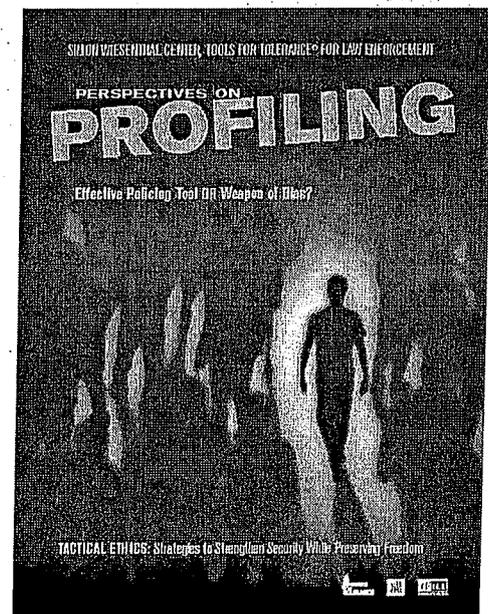
Realistic training environment

These interactive media tools are very realistic. Characters are "never hokey, trite and stiff," says Sloane. Characters are also not one-dimensional, stereotypical stick figures that

"turn learners off," she adds.

Using decision-based scenarios, the productions touch a host of gray areas where issues are not clear-cut. The characters all have lives and conflicts in their lives. They are placed into a situation in a real-life environment. "These are multi-dimensional people with personalities," says Sloane. We build stories around them. We are not skimming the surface with 'John Does.' "

As a result, trainees reportedly become involved both cognitively and emotionally. The scenarios are designed to involve the trainee so personally that he is subconsciously

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thinking he is present in the scene. The exercises bring the recruit or in-service officer to critical decision points in which the situation may be able to branch off to 20 or more endings, according to Sloane.

These programs may be used by departments in several ways to leverage their training investment. The software may be used in facilitated sessions or operated by officers on their own. The Army uses WILL's interactive media in three ways. First, a single individual can use the video on a computer. Second, a small group can view the scenario on a desktop, playing different characters one at a time, in sequence. Individuals from the group can supply input, and the trainees arrive at a group decision. Lastly, the video can be projected in an auditorium with different participants playing each of six characters. If desired, group discussions can ensue.

A group also may wait until the end of the video to go over the choices that were available at the beginning to see where other selections may have taken them. Or they may review the various choices immediately after making their selection. If they make bad choices, it can really take them off track, Sloane explains. A series of bad choices begins to close out alternatives, but students don't know that at the time. As the action progresses, students may ask themselves: Why am I in this situation? Why am I not getting good choices?

With a click of the mouse, students see the choices they made and identify how those choices impacted the outcome. "They begin to question, 'Where did we mess up?' and then they can go back and discover the reason,"Sloane says. "It reinforces the message so that they begin to think differently and chose different alternatives in the future. [And as a result] they will make better decisions when they confront the real thing."

Safety of cyberspace

It is anticipated that through digital game-based learning students will actually step into a virtual reality situation. This permits experiential learning to take place in the safety of cyberspace. To have the greatest impact, scenarios can target areas that might be dangerous, costly and or catastrophic if reenacted physically.

Because "production values are high,"notes Sloane, the programs are a "highly engaging"experience. "The content is accurate and current. The storyline is believable and engaging. And, the message is cogent and thought-provoking."

Reiterating the company tagline, Sloane sums up the message: "Play it out before you live it out."And that, in reality, can keep you alive. ■

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