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the magazine



INTERNATIONAL TACTICAL OFFICERS TRAINING ASSOCIATION



“Ready for anything...Always observant”

It is a Tuesday morning and at 10:05 am a call comes into the 911 center that there is an active shooter at your local high school. The frantic caller states that shots have been fired. The dispatcher puts out the call and following the new active shooter procedure the first closest cars are dispatched to the scene. Three patrol officers respond and arrive at the school. One officer goes to his trunk and retrieves an M4 automatic weapon. The two others meet at him at the entrance of the school. As the team of three enters the school a terrified teacher runs up to them and states that she believes the shooter is on the second floor in one of the classrooms. She thinks there is only one shooter, but is not sure.

The three officers proceed to the second floor and while climbing the stairs hear three additional shots fired. As they traverse the hallway a young male comes running toward them with an object in his hand. One of the officers yells: “Stop, put your hands above your head!” With their service weapons pointed at the youth, one of the officers believes he sees a gun as the young man moves his hands forward gripping the object. The officer fearing for his life takes a shot and hits the young man in the chest. The officer with the M4 believing that the other officer saw a weapon shoots a burst of three rounds at the young man all missing the target except one that hits him in the left arm. As the three officers approach what they believe is the shooter they observe the young man is only holding a cell phone. While

their attention is drawn to the boy who is laying in the hallway, the active shooter who has spent numerous hours playing video games levels the .45 caliber semi automatic pistol he has taken from his father’s dresser at the officers. He pulls the trigger and shoots the first officer in the head and he is killed instantly. This active shooter’s reactions are so fast, intense, and with lack of any remorse because he is used to hitting the reset button on his video games, he takes another shot at the second officer also hitting him in the temple and he falls dead in the hallway. The third officer attempting to react fires the M4 in the direction of the assailant and misses sending rounds into the classroom which strike another student.

Yes, this is a worst case scenario and one that should be keeping every police administrator awake at night. Is it possible? You bet, it could happen on any given day in any community around the country. In analyzing or performing a theoretical autopsy of such a scenario we need to look at what can or could have prevented this type of tragedy from happening. When we examine the training of the officers we must question what firearms training have they received and how often do they practice their skills. We need to question what are the observation skills and visual acuity officers have as they make a determination of what is a threat or what is not a threat in real time. Also, officers need to be trained to recognize and be prepared to accurately

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weapons? Are they checking any associates, like a female accompanying a male that may armed or handed a weapon to hide discovery? Are officers trained to be observing behavioral cues such as dress or movement that indicate potential violent actions? Does the officer notice a shirt that is rippled on one side and not the other as an indication that a weapon may be hidden? Are officers cognizant of a person frequently touching a concealed weapon with hands or arms to assure position, especially when changing body positions – standing, sitting, exiting a vehicle or running in a way to control security of the weapon? Are they observing to see if suspects or offenders blade their body away from officer to ensure concealment and ease of access?

All of these behavioral cues need to be automatic and extrinsic observational tools that are as important, if not more so to the officer than the firearm carried on his or her belt. It must also be noted that research indicates that most offenders are street combat veterans who are ready to shoot when threatened. In nearly 70 % of the police shootings the offender hit the officer by point shooting and by firing first. Those officers that have been trained to align their sights vs. point shooting need to retrain themselves for street combat readiness.

Using a weapon in the line of duty is what a law enforcement officer will do the least in his or her career,

react to behavioral cues.

In the initial training of a police officer there are no courses or consistent training given to develop or increase observation skills, let alone any in-service training during an officer's career. Although, such skills are fundamental requisites of every operational decision that will be required in a law enforcement officer's career, there has been a dangerous oversight based on a false notion that personnel coming into the profession have innate observation skills. . Officers must be trained to understand the offender and be instinctively aware of behavioral cues.

Seasoned police officers rely on their experience to recognize patterns they have observed and depend on becoming situationally aware from prior incidents or anecdotal stories. Yet, there is no consistency to what is experienced or what the officer learns on the job. Experience alone not only takes time, but can be a tough and fatal teacher.

According to FBI statistics we know that offenders most often carry a gun in their waistband or in the groin or small of the back and do not use a holster. Yet, how observant are officers watching for these cues? We also know that approximately 40% carry a second or back-up weapon, yet are officers always cognizant when searching a subject and finding a gun to continue to search for additional



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yet it is the most important decision that he or she will ever make. To err one side can result in a criminal offense or severe civil liability that can ruin the officer financially and psychologically, the officer's family and the department. To err on the other side can result in the death of the officer, colleagues or others innocent persons.

Most officers have learned the legal and tactical considerations necessary when deciding whether or not to use deadly force. Neither learning from a textbook, learning

in a classroom or firing range can adequately prepare an officer for a sudden violent confrontation. Officers are expected to respond to dynamic conditions in a fraction of a second and are put at the tactical disadvantage of having to react to visual stimuli or cues before taking action. Couple this with an FBI estimate that the criminal element does approximately 40% more firearms training than law enforcement officers and today's youth are playing violent video games that train them to shoot with incredible speed and accuracy is putting officers in greater jeopardy.

Enter Rapid Recognition Training (RRT) or "Rebooting your brain through mental athletics". RRT is a methodology that trains your eyes and brain to see faster than you have

ever imagined. The human brain is the most incredible operating system known in the universe. It has often been said that we only use a small portion of our brain, estimates of about 10%. That is not true according to the most current research. We do use all of our brain for different functions. It is the potential of what our brain is capable of that we only use a fraction of. If you have ever done any athletic or fitness training you realize that your physical body will make changes, even grow to accommodate for the stressors that physical exercise can place on it. We know we can increase muscle mass by lifting weights or increase agility by practicing sports like football, baseball, basketball or soccer. The same holds true for our visual and mental processes. When we exercise our visual system and brain our bodies will accommodate to learn new skills. Conversely, like physical movement if we don't exercise our physical body or brain they will atrophy.

During World War II a psychologist named Samuel Renshaw developed a system to help in the identification of enemy vs. friendly aircraft and ships. He invented a device called a tachistoscope, which was a slide projector with a lens attachment that would enable an image to be shown in micro-seconds. The Army and Navy both credited Renshaw for saving countless lives having trained pilots and sailors using this system. What Renshaw found was that by flashing images at extremely fast speeds that the human visual/mental system would accommodate enabling pilots,

soldiers, and sailors the ability not only to see, but to rapid identify objects. Current research has determined that new neural connections in the brain are created when exposed to such training.

Flash Recognition Training, as it was called was also used during the 1950's at the Southern Police Institute (SPI) where it showed significant success in training police officers. In a study written by Professor Rolland Soule Assistant Director, he states:

"...the individual sharpens and enhances his visual preceptors (eyes) and seeing becomes more effective, more coherent and more fluent." He further found "By gradually increasing the speed of the flash and the amount of the material to be perceived unnecessary eye movements are eliminated, and the span of perception and recognition are broadened."

The time that it was successfully used at SPI was far before the appearance of the personal computer. The system used the tachistoscope which was cumbersome and required a classroom setting and numerous hours of training which is why we believe the system was not further explored.

O2D has taken this proven methodology and enhanced it through the use of computer technology, thereby making it a convenient system that only requires a personal computer or a DVD player to practice the skill. In addition, the Rapid Recognition™ mental workout has been designed to be law enforcement specific and can be practiced at a self regulated pace.

Consider the worst case scenario that was presented at the beginning of this article. What if the officers were instantly able to distinguish the difference between a weapon and a cell phone? What if their ability to accurately scan the area for threats or danger was trained and increased? What if their ability to more accurately access a target and kill zone was enhanced? This training is not only effective in officer safety, but could reduce liability law suits and the devastation of wrongful shootings. It would provide officers with the edge they need to be effective in rapidly changing dynamic situations. It can also serve as a force multiplier by making officers more effective in a tight economy.

The effectiveness of Observation On Demand's Rapid Recognition Training has been beta tested using a laser based force simulation shooting system. Preliminary test results that have been achieved by obtaining a baseline of target acquisition skill prior to RRT and testing again after an 8 hour class have shown an average of 32% initial increase gains in target acquisition speed and improvement in marksmanship skill.

In today's "techno-centric" society we must not rely on technology to do our job because no matter what technology is invented there continues to be a human being that has to make a decision. Technology is only an adjunct to increase our effectiveness. We can't let technology "dumb us down." We must use technological advances such as, computer training and force simulation systems to grow our brains and increase both our visual, mental and decision making skills to meet the difficult challenges of today's society.

To learn more: www.observationondemand.com

