

Just a head's up: The *Force Science Certification Course* scheduled for **Dec. 5-9 in San Jose, CA** is nearing capacity. Less than 10 seats remain. [Click here](#) for details on the course and instructions for registering, or visit [www.forcescience.org/2011certification.pdf](http://www.forcescience.org/2011certification.pdf)

In this edition:

I. Experience speaks: Yours thoughts on stemming the grim KIA tide

#### **Experience speaks: Your thoughts on stemming the grim KIA tide**

In Transmission #181 of *Force Science News*, we invited your thoughts on how to reverse this year's alarming increase in LEO fatalities in the U.S. Almost immediately our in-box began to bulge with your insightful responses.

Here is a sampling, edited for brevity or clarity in some cases and useful as training reminders in all. The writers, of course, are expressing personal views and do not speak for their agencies.

#### **When adrenaline trumps training and common sense...**

In my own 12+ years in law enforcement, I have personally known 2 officers who have been shot (non-fatally) and one who died in a crash. In each case it happened because they let their adrenaline take over, and their training and common sense went out the window.

The first officer witnessed a minor hit-and-run traffic crash. During a short pursuit, his cup of coffee went everywhere inside his car, adding to his emotional "rush." Even though there were 2 more officers close behind when the fleeing driver crashed again and stopped, the primary officer rushed to the suspect's vehicle and went hands-on as the suspect began to exit. The fight was on. The officer was disarmed and shot through both thighs with his .45. That officer eventually was forced to medically retire due to the build-up of scar tissue and the chronic pain in his legs.

The second officer was in foot pursuit of a likely drug dealer at an apartment complex. Though he'd lost sight of the suspect, he ran around the corner of a building where he'd last seen the subject, and the offender was waiting for him with a handgun drawn and aimed. The suspect fired, striking the trauma plate in the officer's vest and knocking him onto his back, fortunately not seriously injured but a very narrow escape.

The most tragic incident involved an officer who wrote a trespass warning to a transient who refused to leave a convenience store. Shortly afterward, dispatch informed the officer that the suspect had returned to the store and was hassling the clerk. Given that the suspect was blatantly ignoring the recent warning, the officer was probably feeling some emotion.

Even though he was only a few miles away, he reached a speed of over 100 mph racing to the store. When he swerved left to pass a truck, he lost control of his cruiser, which went through 1 utility pole and wrapped around the next one. When the steering column and dashboard were pried off of his crushed legs, he bled out internally through his shattered femoral arteries as he screamed in pain, a scream his fellow officers on scene will never forget. There was nothing anybody could have done to save him.

Each of these officers, spurred on by adrenaline and emotion, placed themselves in more danger than was necessary.

What I have tried to teach as an FTO includes:

- **Recognize the situation for what it is.** Don't let an overly excited dispatcher (or officer) get you overly excited. Ask yourself: Do I really need to drive this fast to get there? Do I really need to leave cover right now to get hands on the suspect? Be your own FTO, and recognize when you need to grab yourself by the collar and pull yourself back.

- **Recognize the adrenaline rush.** In situations such as pursuits, expect it, recognize it when it comes, and keep it under control. In the last pursuit I was in, several officers left cover and rushed the suspect's vehicle after it was stopped by a PIT maneuver. The suspect had his gun in his hand. It was little more than luck that he was shot and killed before he could fire it. In a similar pursuit where several officers rushed up to go hands-on, 1 of them got disarmed. The suspect fired multiple shots and killed an officer before he himself was shot and killed. Did either

of those situations have to end like they did?

- **Use it when you need it.** In situations such as a hands-on fight, or especially when you're injured, the adrenaline rush is your friend. Don't hold back; use it and stay in the fight, but recognize when to put the brakes on.

- **Remember, it's not personal, it's business.** Leave your emotions at home. I know, easier said than done. But along with your adrenaline, emotions such as anger will at least get you in trouble, or worse, will get you killed. There seems to be very little training emphasis on that today, although it clearly is an officer survival issue.

*Dpty. Dan Walter  
Boulder County (CO) SO*

#### **Tactical positioning and vest protocol**

Two of our officer deaths in Canada this year involved motor vehicles, one a stolen snow plow and the other a van driven by a 15 year old. In the case of the snow plow the officer was not standing in a safe place and with the van it appears the officer reached inside and got trapped and then dragged and crushed under the van when it rolled over. Training is critical in officers knowing what is a dangerous tactic. With better threat-assessment tools, these 2 officers would likely be alive today.

As to wearing a vest, I would add that vests should be worn under the shirt not over. In Canada we have fallen into a pit of wearing vests in a dark-colored carrier clearly visible to everyone. Not only does this sometimes escalate an incident and create new deadly targets but it also creates some self-defense issues by providing handles for suspects to grab and control the officer. ERT and the military have to wear their vests outside because of bulk. When they do, it is the same color or camo as the uniform, thus reducing the risks.

*Brian Carter (RCMP, ret.)  
Senior Project Manager  
Occupational Health & Safety  
Nova Scotia Public Service Cmsn.*

#### **Critical safety tenets**

Two points that I drive thru to all my officers:

1. When confronted with a firearm threat and you are taking fire...SHOOT-MOVE-COVER. Do it immediately, regardless of which you do first.
2. Be a master of threat assessment. ALWAYS perform the Quick Scan: Check the HANDS, check the WAIST area, and check the SURROUNDING AREA (anything within the subject's reach).

*Trng. Ofcr. Carmelo Colon  
Lead use-of-force instructor  
Ft. Lauderdale (FL) PD*

#### **More emphasis needed on criminal activity cues**

I would also like to see trainers instruct more heavily regarding criminal activity cues--information suggesting potential danger that an officer receives prior to actually encountering the suspect. Reacting both physically and mentally to such cues will help reduce reaction time, and therefore save lives.

Just a few examples:

- **Dispatched information.** If telecommunication indicates the suspect has a weapon, then the officer may have a better idea of where and how to make an approach, both before and after exiting his vehicle.
- **Radio information from other officers already at the scene.** They may be able to advise on environment or description of known suspects, which may assist in making a tactical approach by vehicle and by foot.
- **What the officer sees and hears as he arrives at the scene.** Are officers or civilians taking cover? Do other officers have their weapons drawn? Do there appear to be injured persons about? Are gunshots or screams audible? Are witnesses making hand gestures or otherwise trying to communicate important information?

I recently trained 176 state LE agents who, as a whole, were above average in training, experience, and professionalism. Still, I noticed a slow response to criminal activity cues provided in the scenarios. For example, at the sound of gunfire, most officers would slowly put their hand on their sidearm, but very few would actually draw until something further developed. Another example was the inability to recognize the need for taking cover.

*Res. Ofcr. Jerry Cooper  
Cleveland (NC) PD*

#### **2 training shortcomings that threaten survival**

Too much static, straight-on shooting during training does nothing to help officers survive a dynamic gunfight. If you have never drawn your weapon while moving laterally or forward and back, chances are you will remain a stationary target or have trouble drawing while trying to move. Remember, panic is the absence of training.

Regarding "verbal cues," I've found that the reason officers stand there and

Regarding verbal traps, I've found that the reason officers stand there and "verbalize them to death" is that in all too many shoot/don't shoot training scenarios the instructor has the role player obey proper commands. Thus the officer in training develops a false sense of security that real-life offenders will obey. Training must re-create, to the best of our abilities, real-life situations and in real life there are people intent on killing us.

*Ptl. Rich Stanton  
Sr. firearms instructor  
Boston PD SWAT*

#### **Focus on improvement, not castigation**

Officers and supervisors need to evaluate handling of real-life events with a critical eye. Do we have the skills and fortitude to recognize mistakes have been made and take corrective actions?

Consider the Navy Blue Angels flight team. At the end of every flight, there is a debriefing in which rank is taken off the table and every member can feel safe to do self-criticism or constructive criticism of another team member. Law enforcement needs to adopt this same mentality where pre- and post-performance is evaluated with a critical eye, with the focus on improvement rather than castigation or discipline.

Also think about training in triads. Instead of using the common approach of having 1 officer role play the part of the trainee and another the part of the suspect, add a third to act as a coach to give immediate feedback. Rotate positions so that each person plays each part. This increases skills, retention, and abilities dramatically.

*Lt. Curtis Cope (ret.)  
Consultant/Expert Witness/Master Instructor  
Huntington Beach, CA*

#### **Monthly critique of police deaths needed**

I'd like to have a national bulletin on officer deaths put out monthly by the FBI to all local, state, and federal LE agencies. The bulletin would go into significant and appropriate detail on who died, what happened, where, when, why, and how. It would cover the dynamics of each situation and how it all went down. It would have a follow-up section from trainers on suggestions on how to handle similar situations. The bulletin would be used to enhance safety and not as a Monday-morning quarterback tool.

Meanwhile, what can you do right now to best avoid becoming a grim statistic?

- Always be a student of our profession, especially use of force/force science/conflict management.
- Always seek self-improvement.
- Always learn from mistakes (your own and others).
- Always be willing to use change as a tool for improvement.

*Sean Foley  
Former capt./acting chief  
Northlake (TX) PD*

**Dr. Bill Lewinski**, executive director of the Force Science Institute, adds this observation:

"The need for more detailed documentation of force-related incidents is urgent. The statistical data currently gathered at the national level does not provide the kind of information needed to improve training and officer safety in the field. The types of data Sean Foley suggests, particularly specifics about how encounters begin and progress, will help to better analyze the human dynamics of force used by and against officers and devise corrective measures."

#### **Buying time even for "unprepared" officers**

As a SWAT team leader and trainer, I push the safety concepts of slowing situations down, controlling what is taking place, and putting yourself in a position of advantage to narrow the reactionary gap.

If a suspect's goal is to injure, kill, or attempt to flee, then he/she will have to work very hard and increase their body movements to carry out an attack. This gives even officers who are not prepared more notification and time to react.

*Sgt. Jon Meck  
Peoria (AZ) PD*

#### **Bad intel from CIs can bring violence**

A factor not considered is what officers are told about a suspect or suspects they are about to arrest and/or a location they are about to raid, which, sadly, often involves confidential informant information that has been improperly corroborated and/or not corroborated at all. Police action based on false or exaggerated informant information is often the root cause of violent encounters. A due word of precaution for our guys on the street!

*Michael Levine*

*Former federal agent/undercover operator  
Trial consultant/expert witness  
Stone Ridge, NY*

**Training cuts boost street casualties**

I think the number of officer deaths and injuries have a direct correlation to the economy and budget cuts. Most trainers will agree that when it comes to department cuts, training is the first to be compromised. Yet constant updated training is key to officer survival as it reinforces a consistent survival mind-set. When we see training diminished we see officer deaths and injuries increase.

*Ptl. Craig Polachek  
Training Officer  
Elkhart County (IN) SD*

**"Concise, accurate, practical, potentially lifesaving"**

As a trainer, supervisor, and certified Force Science Analyst, I read a fairly extensive amount of information on a number of law enforcement subjects. I have to say that your most recent newsletter, "As police deaths mount, what can you do now to stay safe?", is one of the most outstanding articles I have read in 20-plus years. It is concise, accurate, practical and potentially lifesaving to those who apply it. I have forwarded it to our entire department and will be doing so to all of the recruit school students I instruct.

*Lt. Mark Pankow  
Wausau (WI) PD*