

Educating Leaders for Tactical Success

By Paul Howe

General

I have witnessed the separation of leadership from their tactical roles/duty for some time now in both the military and law enforcement arenas. This relationship is critical to mission success whether it patrol missions or high risk tactical operations. Leadership needs to be trained, informed and prepared to make tactical decisions if they expect to be effective leaders when a crisis arises.

Two types of leaders come to mind when I think of high risk missions. The first type of leader is the one that delegates the authority to the team to execute the tactical mission and allows them to act as they see fit. They know and trust the team to do the right thing and understand the team has trained to the level to ensure mission success. As a general rule, these teams will walk away superior results. Normally I see this style used in departments where the chief is busy being the chief and understands that do not have the time necessary to run the department and the tactical team at the same time.

The second type is the leader who never trains with the team, wants the title and prestige of being called "Tactical Commander." Without proper training, they want to call the shots once a tactical situation has gone critical. Generally they don't know the capabilities of the team, the various tactics employed or their role in the operation. Often they will be heard calling over the radio, "don't do anything until I get there," all the while the situation is crumbling, lives are in danger and people are dying. Generally once they get to the scene, their brain overloads with all the information they are trying to process and they cannot make timely decisions because they are not familiar with needed tactics and techniques needed to resolve the problem. This results in additional danger for the team, hostages and innocents.

Training for Success: Patrol

The most time critical high risk missions for patrol comes in two forms. One is that of an Active Shooter and the other is Officer Down. In both cases, time is critical to save lives.

Active Shooter

Active Shooter missions require officers to decisively act to neutralize threats quickly and efficiently. In the case of Virginia Tech, for every minute we did not penetrate the target, the offender put three innocent bodies on the floor. Active Shooter scenarios require officers to fight to a breach point, breach a door, move down hallways, conduct Close Quarter Battle (CQB), neutralize the threat and then begin treating wounded. There is a great deal going on in this mission and prior training and planning is critical. Also, yearly maintenance training should be performed with all the potential responding agencies to discuss who does what once the threat has been removed. Command and control will be critical to ensure that the rest of the school is secure and that the wounded are quickly and efficiently treated and evacuated from the sight. If you are a tactical leader and don't know what to do or how to do it, you should start learning now.

Officer Down

Officer Down is the other time critical mission where I have witnessed leaders dropping the ball. Once an officer is shot and down, generally they have 4-6 minutes of oxygen and blood loss before they expire if the wounds are severe.

It is critical that fellow officers are trained and empowered to respond quickly and efficiently with officer down drills to recover and treat their fellow officers. Otherwise, they will die. In a case last year in West Texas, one bad guy shot three officers and the downed officers laid out in the open for hours ensuring their death. The chief refused to take action. They glassed (used bino's) the downed officers and assumed they were dead. They made a feeble attempt to tug at the downed officers with a robot. This in my mind is unacceptable.

Here are a couple of options to help you, should you find yourself in this situation. Empower your patrol shifts to take action and require them to practice officer down recovery drills using their patrol cars.

Next, treat an officer down scenario as an active shooter situation and use either Swat or Active Shooter teams to neutralize the threat. Aggressive? You bet. In my mind this is a hostage rescue scenario as the officer(s) are being held under direct weapons fire from the threat. As in hostage rescue, we don't focus on the injured, we neutralize the threat first. If you do not,

you will get fired upon while you are trying to recover the officers and possibly take more casualties and probably not neutralize the threat.

Training for Success: Tactical Teams

Tactical teams usually have more time to resolve tactical situations but often windows of opportunity are missed by leaders who don't know their role and who do not delegate authority to act.

The most common situation I can use to illustrate this point is where snipers are deployed in a hostage rescue scenario and there is a REACT team standing by to assault. The commander is in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) or Command Post and negotiators are on the phone with the hostage taker.

In this case, all three, the Commander, a Sniper or a REACT team leader can initiate an assault.

A **sniper** can see where the suspect is going to kill a hostage and they can make the shot to prevent this. They can then launch the react team to penetrate the target and secure the hostage taker and recover hostages.

The **REACT** team leader near the crisis point may hear "please don't kill me" and then the rack of a shotgun. In this case, the snipers may not see what is happening and the command may not either. The REACT team leader should move to terminate the threat.

Finally, as a **commander**, you are in the command post and a negotiator tells you that the hostage taker told them that he was going to kill a hostage to make a point and slammed the phone down. Snipers don't have a shot. You must launch the REACT team.

My point being with all these scenarios, everyone must know what can happen and what their role in the mission is. This needs to be address during training prior to a real operation.

Conclusion

Commanders should be held accountable for failing to train just as tactical team leaders and team members can be held liable.

As a commander, get out of the office and attend training. Find out what they are doing and when. Observe and let them work on their drills and SOP's. Once they are comfortable, put them through organizational scenarios and test them. Finally, understand your role in the mission.

Occasionally have a staff prepare and run scenarios where you are tested making decisions. You can execute an action and solve a problem. Once you do this, you can reload the scenario by putting the role players back in the game and change the outcome. In one scenario, the hostage taker may give up, the next, they may come out fighting. The next you may have a sniper engage them. The next, you might have to assault the target. I think you get the picture.

As a sub unit leader, notify the commanders when you are going to train and request they be there. Always discuss what your part in the mission is and what theirs is. Ensure they know the answers to the test before it goes critical.

If commanders fail to attend training, document it. Keep a record of your training dates and those that the commander failed to attend. Weak leaders will try to blame everyone but themselves when things go bad. You may need this record one day to protect yourself and the team.

About the Author

Paul R. Howe is a 20-year veteran and former Special Operations soldier and instructor. Paul currently owns Combat Shooting and Tactics (CSAT) where he consults with, trains and evaluates law enforcement and government agencies in technical and tactical techniques throughout the special operations spectrum. See www.combatshootingandtactics.com for details.