

## **SWAT SELECTION AND TRAINING-RAISING THE BAR**

American law enforcement will one day face criminals and terrorists that will have endured a much more rigorous and intense selection and training process than their own SWAT personnel. For this and several other reasons, SWAT selection and training must be kept at a high standard, pure from politics and social experimentation. The success of the high-risk missions will hinge on a cohesive and highly trained SWAT element that has such standards in place. High standards in selection and training will help ensure the survival and safety of both the citizen and the SWAT officer.

I am a firm believer that mediocrity in selection and training breeds liability. Further, management attempts to artificially create equality at all costs is also a liability and will destroy unit cohesion at the very core of a tactical unit. Going against armed hardened criminals is not a social experiment, nor should it be treated as one. We should select the best personnel for the job, period.

### **Why try out for SWAT?**

What motivates officers to apply for SWAT? Serving in SWAT has several advantages over other assignments. First, it gives officers who want to “serve and protect” at a higher level, a place to do so. These officers seek to enter harms way more often, doing what others would prefer to do less frequently. Further, they may wish to serve with highly motivated individuals, who also seek a higher degree of training and individual proficiency in their chosen profession.

### **Have one selection/Swat standard and keep it gender/race neutral**

Too many times we apply irrelevant social standards to our SWAT selection criteria in an effort to get an ethically and gender “balanced” team. In effect, we lower the overall standard and capability of the team to seek some notional semblance of equality. Selection standards should be known, posted and applicable to the worse case scenario, versus the best. We should put the burden of attaining fitness and tactical proficiency on the back of the individual officer who applies for SWAT and not the department. Simply put, if the officer wants to be on SWAT, they must put in personnel time to hone their physical fitness and individual skills such as shooting to make the selection process and not be handed an assignment because of a political appointment. Individual initiative is a critical component of a SWAT officer’s make-up and should be weighed heavily during the selection process. This element is critical to building a cohesive and tactically proficient tactical team.

I do not mean to “stab” at any gender, race or socio-economic group. I was told long ago, by a former leader, “when you can do what I do, you can go where I go.” When we apply a lower standard to the selection process for social reasons, we lower the overall unit standard and capability of the unit. When we promote a lower standard, we are doing an injustice to the people we serve. We should require all selection candidates to

make the same high mission oriented standard and not lower it to make them feel better or increase the numbers or quotas. In effect, raise the bar and require officer candidates to rise to a higher level versus catering to a weak human nature and excuses. I would prefer to go into harm's way with a few select individuals who I know and trust rather than a group, who I have to watch for safety, tactical proficiency and courage. I would rather give a majority of my attention to the threat we are going up against.

How do we raise the bar? We need to have one set of goal-oriented standards that apply to the SWAT mission. Separate standards for genders or ethnic groups, whether physical, written or oral will only create ill will, mistrust and tension within the unit. How do we make a tests equal? Simple. I will use the average weight of a dummy used in the drag test as an example. How do we determine what the weight of the dummy should be? First, add the weight of all team members in their full tactical gear together and then divide it by the number of people weighed to get an average weight. This should be the weight of the dummy. It not only realistic, but it is fair and is geared to worse case scenario should a real life casualty have to be moved.

### **Selection of SWAT Leadership should be the same as the standard officer**

Again, selection of personnel for SWAT leadership should be gender, race and a politically neutral decision. Preferably, this selection should be conducted from within the SWAT element for continuity and ease of integration. Too many times leadership is implanted from other parts of the department. Often, personnel with no SWAT experience or a short "ticket punch" are sent back in to lead officers who have a great deal more experience and talent.

This in turn causes the unit to regress and take a step back to re-train a weak link. On the other hand, I do believe in a rotation system where SWAT officers go back out in the mainstream of the department after 6-8 years and give back to the overall organization. These rotations will spread the leadership wealth throughout the organization and also allow regular officers to interface with SWAT personnel and help end the perception of elitism. This will lessen the animosity that is generally present within the department toward special assignment personnel.

### **Standards should be higher than department average**

Let's face it, if your SWAT standard is the same as your department standard, there is something wrong. Why? If the average patrol person could handle the situation with their standard and level of training, they would not need to call SWAT into action. But because the situation is more delicate and generally more hazardous, special skills are needed to ensure the safety of the community and that of your fellow officers. Unfortunately, many times teams adopt the same standard as that of the department because it readily available and easy to implement instead of holding themselves to a higher standard.

In summary, I don't care who is behind me going through a door, but what I do care is that they made the same selection process and training standards as I did and they possess the same physical, mental and tactical skills necessary to fight through any situation and accomplish the mission.

True professionals don't care about the race or gender of their brother and sister officers, but they do care whether or not these individuals have met the same high standards in selection and training. Long ago I was taught and still believe, that we all bleed the same.