



TRAINING MODULE: TAKING AIM

PURPOSE: To provide insight into the significance of an officer's appearance, demeanor, and perceptions as it relates to officer safety, assaults and injuries.

TIME: 30 Minutes

OBJECTIVES:

- Become familiar with the concept of Taking AIM
- Become aware of how an officer's appearance and demeanor can affect the perceptions of others
- Define the perceptual shorthand and learn what can be done to combat it
- Learn about the supervisors' role in protecting officers from common pitfalls involving perceptions

PARTICIPANTS MATERIALS:

- Participant Manual
- Taking AIM pamphlet

TRAINER MATERIALS:

- Training Manual
- PowerPoint Presentation

Taking AIM



Zero Officers Killed or Injured

Taking AIM

■ Taking AIM:

- Awareness
- Image
- Mindset

Awareness: Every year, more than 50,000 law enforcement officers are assaulted in the United States. Most officers tend to think that bad things always happen to others. Officers need to be aware that they too could be a victim and that anyone- young/old, tall/short, thin/heavy, may be a potential assaulter. All situations contain unknown circumstances and officers can not become complacent. Officers must realize they are responsible for their own safety.

Image: The image an officer thinks he/she is projecting may not be perceived the same way by potential offenders.

Predatory animals perceive weakness and humans are no different. Research has shown that the way offenders perceive officers impacts how they interact with them. Suspects will pay close attention to an officer's behavior prior to assaulting him/her.

- How an officer walks, speaks, gestures, moves, and looks communicate non-verbal signals

Officers need to strive to project the best possible professional image conveying that they are alert and prepared. Their actions and mannerisms must imply that they are formidable opponents.

MINDSET: Officers need to take training seriously and be mindful of safety procedures. They need to mentally prepare with what-if-then scenarios and realize that they can not rely on reading persons or situations.

Taking AIM

■ Case Study

Articulate Robber

An 18 year old suspect was fleeing the scene of an armed robbery when he was stopped by the victim officer. The officer casually confronted the subject without drawing his firearm. The suspect shot and killed the officer.

CASE STUDIES:

Articulate Robber:

18 year old suspect was fleeing the scene of an armed robbery. The officer located the suspect who matched the description and attempted to stop him in a casual manner, calling to the suspect to stop without drawing his weapon. The officer was shot and killed.

- Offender described officer's demeanor as, "**not authoritarian, was very polite and did not take control of me or make any attempt to control my actions.**"
- Officer didn't see offender as a threat and made no attempt to protect himself and even though he was an armed robbery suspect, the officer never drew his weapon.
- The offender evaluated the officer's behavior and decided that he "**had the edge.**" He perceived the officer's vulnerability and took advantage of it.

Taking AIM

■ Case Study

Voice of God

A drug dealer set out to kill a police officer because they were ruining his business. He passed on his first potential victim because of his perceptions of the officer's ability. He waited until another, perceived weaker, officer arrived. He walked up, punched him in the face, took his service weapon and shot him 6 times mortally wounding him.

Voice of God:

A drug dealer/drug user set out to kill a police officer because they were ruining his business. He proceeded to a busy intersection and observed a Sergeant getting work done to his car. Because of his perceptions of this officer, he decided not to attack. He waited a couple of hours for another, perceived weaker, officer to arrive. He walked up to him, punched him in the face, took his service weapon and shot him 6 times killing him.

- **Sergeant:** Offender originally intended to kill him but **“by looking at him, I could tell he would be difficult to overcome.”** He wasn't too large or menacing but **“just looked like he could handle himself.”** Because of this, the offender did not approach him.
- **Victim Officer:** Offender took only a few minutes to decide that this was his victim. The officer appeared, **“overweight and looked easy.”**
- Unknown to the suspect, the officer refused to wear his body armor and had a recent sub-standard rating on his performance evaluation. In addition, one year prior the officer was disarmed by a different subject who was subsequently shot by his partner. **This officer sent assorted non-verbal messages to a variety of people prior to his death- supervisors, other officers, and offenders.**

Taking AIM

- **Case Study**

Dope Boys Case

The suspect wanted to “send a message to the cops” in his city by killing one. He approached several officers working a parade route at a community celebration. The suspect passed on the first officer because of his initial perceptions of him and his abilities. He then located the victim officer, walked up and attempted to shoot him from point blank range in the head. The officer was able to react and push the gun to the side saving his life.

Dope Boys Case:

Suspect wanted to “send a message to the cops” in his city to quit messing with the dope boys. He approached several officers working a parade route at a community celebration. The first officer was perceived as a “**difficult target.**” The suspect located the second officer, whom he perceived to be weaker, walked up and attempted to shoot him from point blank range in the head. The officer was able to react and push the gun to the side saving his life.

Taking AIM

■ Case Study

Traffic Stop

The officer observed a vehicle with a headlight out and initiated a traffic stop. The vehicle was not driving erratic, not suspicious and the officer noticed a soccer league sticker on the bumper. The officer assumed he was dealing with a local family man and therefore failed to mark out on the radio or run the vehicle's license plate. When the officer approached, he was shot in the chest.

Traffic Stop:

The officer noticed a vehicle with a headlight out and initiated a traffic stop. The vehicle was not driving erratic, not suspicious and the officer noticed a soccer league sticker on the bumper. When the officer approached, he was shot in the chest.

Based on his observations, the officer made judgments:

- Local resident, parent of a child in soccer league, assumed they would have a friendly conversation.
- He therefore didn't mark out on the radio, did not run the tag on his computer and approached the vehicle psychologically, emotionally, and tactically unguarded.
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The vehicle had actually been stolen and was used in a robbery earlier that day.

The officer made an assumption and concluded that the incident/suspect posed no threat to his life.

There is no single profile of an offender.

- Threatening vs. non-threatening
- Trusting vs. suspicious
- Young vs. Old

Research into officer assaults has shown that the preconceived images that the officers had about the type of person most likely to assault them rarely proved consistent with the actual offenders.

From 1989-1998, 682 officers were feloniously killed. 75% (509 officers) received fatal wounds within 10 feet of the offender. This area has been defined as the “killing zone.”

What “**inaccurate perceptions**” pulled them into this killing zone.

Taking AIM

■ How to Avoid the Perceptual Shorthand

- Mental Mind Set
 - Recognition of inaccurate perceptions and how to combat them
- Training
 - Effective, realistic, scenario based training

Perceptual Shorthand: As law enforcement officers we are trained to observe others-nervousness, lying, and furtive gestures. It gives an officer a quick and effective means to prepare for potential threats. Officers need to realize offenders are doing the same thing. Improper or incorrect conclusions can be deadly.

- 62% of offenders in the FBI studies indicated that the officers appeared to be “surprised, unprepared and indecisive” during the assault.
- Similarly, 64% of the officers indicated that they didn’t realize the assault was going to occur.

These statistics show that in the assault cases:

- The officers were incorrectly reading the offenders and not recognizing them as a threat as seen in their surprise and perceived lack of preparation for the potential threat

- The offenders were reading the officer's behavior and lack of preparation as a window of opportunity.

How to Avoid Perceptual Shorthand:

Mental Mind Set: Perceptions of reality are a combination of biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. Officers need to recognize inaccurate perceptions and take the necessary steps to combat them.

- Elements as experience, expectations and training affect the way we perceive things.
- Faulty beliefs will contribute to forming inaccurate perceptions.
- The officer's perceptions do not always match those of the assailants. (Examples of common pitfalls)
 - Traffic stops: stop a vehicle for a minor infraction unaware what the occupants may have just done or if they are wanted on unrelated charges.
 - Previous contact with subject has gone smoothly but officer doesn't know what he just did.
 - "Just a Female" Officers treat women with less concern because of perceptions. Example of officer shot in car due to poor search and safety practices, handcuffing in the front.

Training:

- Effective realistic training, scenario based to include night training.
 - With proper training and mental preparation, officers increase the skill options available to them. When training is realistic and engages the "fight-or-flight" mechanisms, officers can become aware of their physical, psychological and emotional reactions and minimize those reactions in their response. We know that practice with high stress events leads to better performance in the field.
 - Effective and realistic training can reduce the intensity/levels of arousal allowing for higher cognitive functioning to prevail.
 - Many officers in the study who survived assaults felt they survived because they took their training seriously.

- Safety Training: Consistent reinforcement of good officer safety practices to include handcuffing, searches, use of force and traffic stops.
- Train officers to realize that their appearance and the verbal/non-verbal messages they communicate can potentially protect them as much as their weapons or body armor.
- Train officers to process observed appearances and behaviors but not to make judgments or draw conclusions resulting in dropping their guard.

Research indicates that in real-life situations, the people who perform the best in emergencies are those who have practiced frequently.

Taking AIM

■ Supervisor Responsibilities

- Monitor officer performance
- Observe officer appearance
- Observe officer demeanor

Supervisor Responsibilities:

- Monitor officer performance
 - Note any drops in performance ratings as a possible sign of trouble
- Observe officer appearance- fitness/professionalism/how they look in uniform
- Observe officer demeanor- if you can tell they are upset, intervene.
 - Is the officer ok to work or have they become a liability
 - **Behavioral Descriptors of Officers Killed/Assaulted:**
 - Friendly
 - Hard Working
 - Service Oriented
 - Failed to follow established procedures especially in regards to:
 - Arrests
 - Handling prisoners
 - Traffic stops
 - Calling and waiting for backup
 - Relies on reading people or situations and inappropriately drops guard.

Warning signs are often present but are missed or ignored. Officers often used short cuts in the past but got away with it. Supervisors must monitor performance and correct behavior. If you as a supervisor are picking up on a negative change in the officer's performance, offenders are too and they may use that to their advantage. Officers need to be aware of the images they portray and realize that it may be an important factor in saving their life.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

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