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POLICE

On the Job

Survival

PLUS

**Training for Balanced Performance
Spiritual Survival**

A BALANCED APPROACH FOR BALANCED PERFORMANCE

It is 0200, on any night; you are on patrol when a car drives through a red light. As you pull in behind the vehicle, you immediately notice several heads moving inside the passenger compartment. Picking up the microphone, you notify the dispatcher of the following basic information: license plate number, color and type of vehicle, number of "observed" occupants, and your planned stop location. You activate the emergency lights and tap the siren to notify the driver that you want him/her to pull over.

As the stop unfolds, your heart rate increases, then the heavy thumping of your heart slowly crawls from your chest into your throat and finally to a light pounding in your head. Your eyes dart from one object to the next, and your vision starts to close down as you look for movement – any movement that may signal a threat...And so it goes night after night in every city, county, and state. The size of your department – small, medium or large – will not matter. The job and the risks are the same for every officer who is "*Doing the Job*."

What is meant by the term "*Doing the Job*?" It is a phrase used to describe the overall concept of working as a police officer, and it covers a broad range of duties and responsibilities. Police officers are viewed as protectors, counselors, arbitrators, and even saviors. However, they may also be perceived as lazy, arro-

gant, abusive, or, at best, necessary but then only wanted when needed. Moreover, when they are required, police officers are expected to be good at what they do. They must be timely in responding to every situation, and they should be prepared to assist in countless problems and issues. In addition to the basic skill sets, an officer must be prepared physically and mentally to use a wide range of abilities to resolve a situation safely for all involved.

If we were to look for a survival ideology, one that could be used to build an effective training program, the following statement might become the cornerstone:

If you are "*Doing the Job*," the potential for you to be seriously injured or killed exists every second of every day of every week.

This simple truism is often ignored on a daily basis by police officers who are "*Doing the Job*." Many police officers live and sometimes die believing, "It will never happen to me" or "I would never do that!" If history repeats itself and if we believe that we should learn from our mistakes, then we have a duty to seek out better training methodologies for the protectors of society. Remember, the number one rule of survival is to survive! There is no magic in learning to survive. It takes hours, weeks, and years; and it must be ongoing every day. Learning to survive cannot be approached from a singular perspective. We must strive for *Balanced Performance* when called to respond.

Law enforcement officers are called upon to fulfill a variety of needs by the

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IN TRAINING ANCE

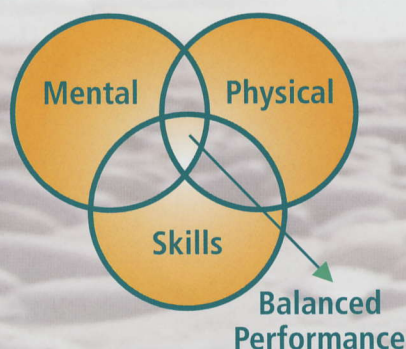
by Damian “Skip” Stites



communities they protect. They are viewed as peacekeepers, counselors, arbitrators, and, at times, the final resolution in any given situation. They must possess the mental preparedness, physical readiness, and skill sets necessary to accomplish the variety of demands placed upon officers. A balanced approach toward training should begin with a new officer and should continue throughout the career of a seasoned officer. Balanced training will provide officers with the tools and confidence necessary to meet the demands of "Doing the Job."

If we were to look at a model of *Balanced Training*, it would be viewed as interconnected circles, each with its own set of values. It is this interconnection, at a critical moment, that allows the officer to achieve *Balanced Performance*.

CIRCLES of PERFORMANCE

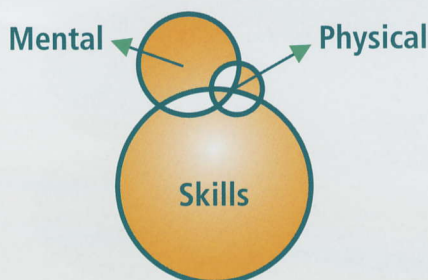


Attention to each circle is required, allowing the circles to expand symmetrically as we learn throughout our career. Too often, we focus on one or two areas of job performance, and our Circles of Performance may be out of balance. The following examples are used to illustrate out-of-balance officers.

- Officers with strong skill circles, moderate levels of mental preparation, and little physical readiness may view themselves in many different ways:

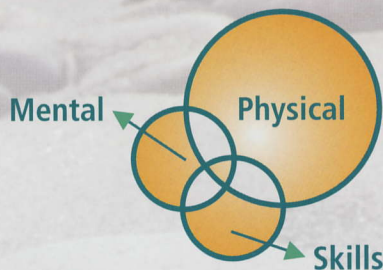
"I am the top shooter at the range. I work hard on my marksmanship skills. I train on arrest techniques, so I will be able to handle myself in

a deadly confrontation. Yeah, I have thought about using deadly force; but I do not need to conduct mental rehearsals of potentially dangerous situations because I am 'Doing the Job' and I know what to do! I work too many hours, and the days are not long enough. I am too tired to exercise. Thirty minutes a day – that will not help anyone! That is why they gave me a patrol car."



- On the other hand, officers may view themselves as being in great physical shape and able to handle any situation:

"I am faithful to my running and weight training. I can overcome any adversary! I will be able to overpower anyone. I have never thought about the what-ifs. That only happens to other officers. I am okay with my weapon. How many times do you really need to use a gun anyway?"



We could continue with a variety of off-balanced Circles of Performance to illustrate how attention to just one or two areas of training over another may affect the officer's ability to respond to a quickly developing, high-risk situation. By now, you may have thought about yourself or have identified officers who may be out of balance in their training regiment and how their circles align. A balanced training program is essential if

officers are expected to respond effectively and appropriately. We will look at some of the reasons that we fall into the cycle of out of balance training.

Officers should rely on basic training to instill the foundation of what, when, and how they should perform their duties. However, once they start "Doing the Job," an officer frequently hears, "Yeah, that's how they do it at the academy; but here in the real world, we do it this way!" We forget the lessons learned from past mistakes are the foundation of what is being taught at most academies. Have we fallen into the on-the-job-training trap? Many times officers assume that if they have been successful in using their style of street tactics, then it must be good. On the surface, this assumption may seem valid; but will the "I have survived this far doing it my way," attitude allow officers to survive every time they are called upon to respond?

A review of officer-involved shootings¹ and the subsequent interviews of the officers concerned may provide some insight into why many officers develop the "so far so good" attitude. While there may be a multitude of reasons officers forego their training, this article will look at two factors that have a strong influence on an officer's attitude toward training.

It is said that experience defines the wise man. It is true that many good techniques were developed by experienced officers who learned while responding to and resolving high-risk situations. However, it is dangerous to believe that utilizing the same tactical or mental approaches when responding to different situations will bring about the same result when dealing with unknown individuals. The "I have always done it this way" approach does contain flaws. Remember, we have no control over other people, their attitudes, or their reactions when they are confronted. If we are faced with a situation that explodes

out of control from our normal expectation and we are not prepared to meet that challenge and win, then we may become another lesson learned.

Have you ever heard the "I'd rather be lucky than good" approach when responding to a law enforcement situation? Unfortunately, I have. If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would have to acknowledge that many of us have walked away from confrontations where luck prevailed. Think about it. Mere luck may have been the deciding factor in our survival! Nevertheless, to accept luck as a foundation of survival, as some will profess, is no better than to value life as a coin flip. However, to discard the role of luck would be wrong. The great microbiologist and chemist Louis Pasteur identified the role of luck when he was quoted as saying, "Chance favors only the prepared mind."² Luck may play a role in survival, but it must be enhanced through a realistic balanced training program. Chance will favor an officer who is balanced and prepared to deal with the events as they unfold.

How do you begin to develop a balanced training program? Philip Hayden, PhD, discussed in his article, "Survival Training for Law Enforcement Officers,"³ the importance of realistic training in preparing officers to correctly respond in a critical moment. Dr. Hayden pointed out that "new curriculum elements were designed to be as realistic as possible in order to assist the trainees in becoming more confident and better prepared to respond appropriately at a moment's notice."⁴ Realistic training is the foundation of a balanced training program, but the realism should not be solely directed at just one or two of the Circles of Performance. Each training evolution must encompass elements that will test and evaluate the officer's mental preparedness and physical readiness and meaningfully measure the officer's skills.

When one officer's actions are viewed by other officers, there are often two distinctly different points of view. The first

point of view states that if an officer overcomes adversity, other officers may connect with the positive results and believe they could have the same outcome.

However, when an officer fails to overcome an adverse situation, the same observing officers take the position, "I would have never done it that way," or "That will never happen to me." Through realistic training, often an exact replay of the incident in question, we discover how we might have reacted. Yet even in realistic training exercises, officers will attempt to avoid actions by stating, "It was only a training exercise," or "I wouldn't have done that in the real world." This defense mechanism is often used when trying to justify one's mistakes and to avoid the realization that they may not be as ready as they once thought.

Balanced Performance Training must provide a solution to the issues identified in the training exercise. Behavior modification will only occur when the officer is ready to accept the change and is provided a path of change to follow. Criticisms of an officer's action in a training environment without a course of action to follow will only fuel the fire of disconnect from the goals of the program. This may encourage the officer to retreat to the practice of doing what has always been done and think that is good enough.

In this article, we have discussed the importance of approaching survival training from a balanced perspective. It has been pointed out that by addressing just one or two of the Circles of Performance, we may find ourselves out of balance when responding to a critical situation. Further, it was noted that many officers have a belief system that allows them to ignore their shortcomings. We may live in the fantasy that we will always perform perfectly or that luck will prevail, but reality is much harsher. An officer must be provided with a path to success in the training environment. The circles must continue to expand equally throughout the career of an officer. There is no end to survival!


Remember, if you are "*Doing the Job*," the potential to be seriously injured or killed exists every second of every day of every week.

In future articles, we will break down the components of each Circle of Performance. Additionally, we will discuss how to develop a training program that expands the officer's ability to perform in critical situations.

Resources

- ¹ FBI Killed and Assaulted 2004
Louis Pasteur, (www.quotationspage.com)
- ² The National Academy Associate
(September/October 2006) pg. 25/31
- ³ The National Academy Associate
(September/October 2006) pg. 28

Concepts And Tactics for Survival (CATS), Inc. is a company that has developed and implemented the training principles contained in this article. The core elements of the FBI's Law Enforcement Training for Safety and Survival Program (LETSS) initially developed by Dr. Phil Hayden (retired 1999) and furthered by his successor Damian "Skip" Stites (retired 2006) are now available for law enforcement agencies worldwide. The CATS training program embraces the mental, physical, and skill development philosophies necessary to provide an officer with the tools needed to survive in the high-risk world of law enforcement.

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