

Becoming a hard target: Do you seem safe to attack? 10 steps to a Stronger officer presence.

By Chris Doughty

The FBI Killed in the line of duty (KILOD) study (Murray.K, 2004) identified a number of characteristics common to officers who were killed in the line of duty. This study included interviews with the offenders who committed the murders. One of the important factors linking these officers was that the offender characterised the officers as being unprepared. This characterisation was made by the offenders after only brief contact with officers, so how did they come to this conclusion?

The way the officers carried them selves, the way they walked, talked, dressed and acted. In short the presence they displayed whilst carrying out their duties.

Confidence and credibility are the basis of strong Officer Presence and according to the FBI study it is an important factor in the decision making of would be attackers. False confidence or bravado just doesn't cut it and as a result, people who are prone to and have experience in violence will immediately sense the charade. Presence as an officer can be split into two parts: Internal confidence in personal abilities and the ability to project that confidence.

This means for Officer Presence to be effective, and to actually be a 'Hard Target', a deep seated self assurance forged in the fires of battle or simulated battle is required. Deep down, an Officer needs to know that their defence and tactics system works and is effective in multiple reality based training situations and real world encounters.

To project the image of a "hard target", an Officer needs to look and feel the part. An Officer who looks like they lack the will or ability to handle themselves in a violent encounter may actually encourage a person with potential for violent behaviour to act.

Developing Confidence and Presence:

1. Get in the gym- Physically sizing up people whether opponents or colleagues is something Officers do automatically every day.

If an Officer is overweight, the burden of an extra 10 or 15kg reduces the appearance of credibility and Officer Presence will be diminished. Lack of physical fitness increases the likelihood of a loss of control of a situation or the chances of being attacked for two reasons:

A. Being out of shape has a significant detrimental effect on physical performance. Even if an individual's fighting skill levels are high, in a violent incident that lasts longer than 60 seconds, a lack of fitness will have a detrimental effect on performance and outcome – something an opponent may use to their advantage.

B. People often make decisions based upon physical appearance: A potential attacker will be more cautious about taking on an Officer who looks like they are a top athlete rather than a person who is clearly out of shape.

Obviously these are two extremes but the fact remains that mobility, the ability to fight for one's life and possibly whether or not involvement in a violent encounter occurs at all in a given situation, is directly related to your physical condition

2. Get Serious about training: Serious training to continually improve tactical skills builds confidence that is tried and tested under stress. Practice the basics over and over and over again, whether it is a pistol draw, crashing into an ISR Matrix Helmet or correctly using a torch. Skills must be able to be executed from all angles and in varying field conditions. Working to improve skill training will be enhanced by seeking out:

A. The system: or teacher that can provide instruction in the specific skills required. This can include training in firearms, tactics, use of force weapons and Martial arts/defensive tactics. This in itself can be a difficult task. For example, in relation to finding a defensive tactics system, I tried many different MA over the years and although I found some competent instructors in their particular art, I realised that the art itself did not lend itself particularly well to the specific challenges faced by Law enforcement Officers.

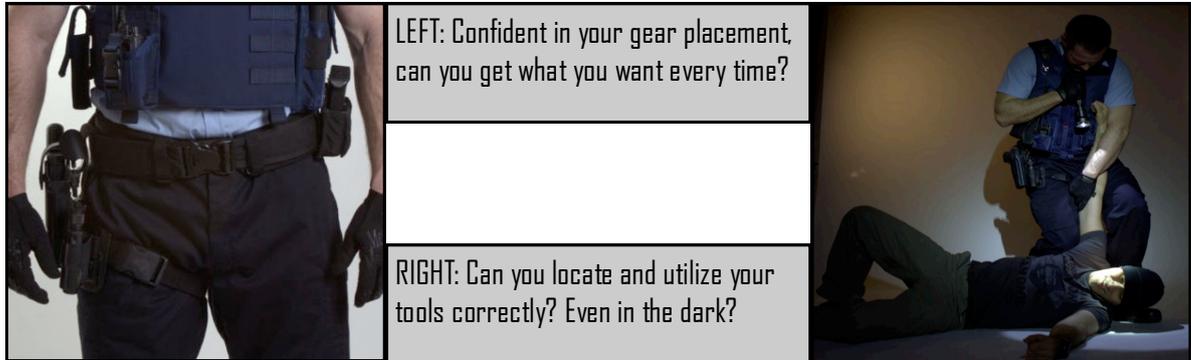
This point was illustrated recently by an Officer acquaintance with strong Brazilian Ju-Jitsu (BJJ) skills. He became involved in a fight in the line of duty and ended up on the ground with the offender in a triangle choke hold. In the first instance, it appeared that he had the offender well controlled until he realised that his thigh holster was now in the perfect position for the offender to access his gun. Martial Arts like BJJ have their place, but there is a need to filter such skills and use the techniques that are specific and applicable to Law enforcement (LE). An ideal system would be one that is built around the restrictions of law enforcement situations, procedures and methods.

B. The Partner: At least one LE training partner to practice with. Practice these skills with a capable person who should also be someone with whom techniques can be discussed and respective personal skill levels and their effectiveness assessed. If possible, fostering a personal training community will be very beneficial.

3. Training for situational awareness - does your personal behaviour create the opportunity for an attack? A lack of attention to what is going on in the immediate environment can project an image of someone who is "safe" to attack. Being closely focused on what is in front may lead to an unwelcome surprise on the realisation that someone is suddenly alongside or worse, behind. A rear position is the most advantageous for both a standard assault and a weapon disarm, therefore situational awareness is a vital skill. Situational awareness can be trained and specific methods are addressed in another article. In the meantime, actively engaging full vision, looking around before and after exiting a vehicle, periodically scanning the area, using peripheral vision when speaking to people and resisting the urge to focus only on the front view will improve awareness and readiness to act if necessary. A person who is not aware of their surroundings will always be a more attractive target than the actively vigilant person.

4. Dress like it's a hot date every night: Every time a work shift commences, an Officer's appearance should scream "I know what I am doing! Uniform should be clean and neat, shirt ironed and tucked in, boots and equipment clean, serviceable and properly secured. If a load bearing vest is worn, ensure it is fitted properly and is not hanging over the belt, thigh holster is secure at a correct height, properly strapped, not loosely at knee level. Some one who is very exacting in the placement and care of their equipment is making a statement that underlines professional presence. Appearance does affect credibility and a poor appearance may encourage adverse consequences. There is no doubt that looking the part can play an important role in dispelling any thought in an opponent's mind that the Officer might seem like an easy target.

- 5. Take care of equipment, know where it is and how it works:** A man wise to the tactical ways once told me 'You don't control the where, the when or the how of the fight, all you can control is what you bring to it' That means personal gear, partners/colleagues and skills. With regard to equipment, know where all personal kit is, how it works and how it is accessed under stress. Practice lying down, sitting in the car, standing up, backing off, advancing or sidestepping. Practice accessing equipment whilst being attacked by a training partner. Knowledge that personal equipment can be accessed under stress adds to the overall confidence base.



- 6. Let competent actions do the talking:** Individuals who continually talk up particular skill sets or abilities they think they excel at, may actually be insecure and lack confidence in their skills. The talk becomes a substitute for proper action in many things these individuals do, including in potentially violent situations where they tell an offender how good they are in an attempt to deflect conflict. In most cases this approach will act adversely on credibility and fosters a negative outcome for two reasons:

A:Opponents who have experience with violence are unlikely to believe the talk

B:Most male offenders, especially the intoxicated ones, will more than likely interpret the talk as a challenge.

In short, let your confident stance, unwavering command voice and professional appearance show the opponent that it will not be a good idea to become involved in an altercation with you.

- 7. Don't get mad, don't get ruffled:** Projecting a calm and confident demeanour and remaining unconcerned by the actions and words of another demonstrates confidence. It also promotes and encourages the mental clarity required to act effectively if required. Controlling one's own behaviour is vital to an expectation of being able to control the behaviour of others.
- 8. Create personal SOP's and look professional at all times: Action cures fear, no fear equals confidence** – to assist confidence in nearly all circumstances, create personal SOP's (Standard Operating Procedures). Most units in LE lack a set of SOP's for every day incidents/actions. Create simple SOP's within the policies, procedures and guidelines of your department, know them and practice them. This means when an incident occurs the how to act plan can already be in place. Immediate and decisive action demonstrates self confidence (action cures fear) and displays decisive and confident decision making especially where the incident or situation involves an intimidating foe.



9. Set a mental trigger: Whether it is in regards to personal SOP's or flinch reaction tactic, have a preset mental trigger. This means setting realistic parameters that if met result in an immediate action. For example:

Situation: An offender has been staring and abusing you, despite efforts to calm the situation verbally, you have shifted your distance because of his behaviour but the offender continues to advance.

Trigger: Offender attacks in any way, in this example he raises his right hand, possibly to throw a punch.

Immediate action: Your arms come up into a helmet/crash and cover block and drive forward into the attacker bridging the gap and taking the power from his swing which puts you in a position to flank and counter.

By setting a mental trigger, the shock factor is taken out of personal reaction time. Knowing this and having a mini plan in place will increase belief in readiness to react and that will translate into stronger officer presence.

10. Know your area: Pre knowledge of where a fight will take place is rare so mitigate this by knowing working areas very well. Know all the biggest 'PROBLEM' houses, their occupants and what they tend to get up to. Know the back alley escape routes, who is feuding with whom and where the most dangerous ambush points are. In knowing the who's who and the what's what in a given area of operations facilitates operating with more confidence and will diminish the impact of others who may try to introduce false or misleading information.

In Conclusion: Officer Presence is one of the key factors in whether or not an Officer appears as a 'safe' target to would be attackers. A strong Officer presence will impact positively on every aspect of policing duties and it is the very first force option. Presence is not a skill in itself but the combination of experience and training both of which can be improved and enhanced through on going learning in both low and high pressure environments.

Dedicating a small amount of time daily to ensuring the building blocks of confidence and strong presence are bonded together is not a significant task. Even practicing drawing equipment when kitting up, ensuring uniform is neat, constant alertness and keeping negative behaviours in check will improve the all important perception of an Officer by potential attackers.

BIO: Chris Doughty spent almost a decade with a major Australian Police Department. His experience extends to remote area Policing, General duties, Public Order and Rapid Response and Operational Safety and Tactics Training. Over his career Chris attended a multitude of Australian and international courses in Firearms and Tactics, Defensive Tactics and Close Personnel Protection. In recent years he has provided training in Africa, the UK, Asia and the USA. He has had the honour of training with and providing training to many US Military, LE and Swat operators in conjunction with PFC USA. He is currently the Director of Training for Progressive Force Concepts Asia Pacific, a Melbourne Australia based Tactical Training company. He can be contacted at: doughty@pfctraining.com.

