

# Critical Decision Making Under Pressure

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Often times, when decisions are made in rapidly changing, dangerous circumstances, they are made without much room for thought. Many of those in the law enforcement and security professions have heard, and, even uttered the following phrases themselves: “I didn’t think about it;” or, “I just acted;” or, “We just did what had to be done.” Can that be true? Can those professionals who are involved in extreme situations, where life and death are at stake, actually make intuitive decisions without thinking, without analyzing options? The answer is clearly, yes. In his research of cognitive development, Dr. Gary Klein talks about making decisions under pressure, in what he describes as recognition-primed decision making. What Klein found as a result of having worked with the United States Marine Corps, emergency workers and businesses across the country, is as follows:

“It was not that the commanders were refusing to compare options. I had been so fixated on what they were not doing that I had missed the real finding: that the commanders could come up with a good course of action from the start. That is what the stories were telling us. Even when faced with a complex situation, the

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commanders could see it as familiar and know how to react. ... the commander's secret was that their experience let them see a situation, even a non-routine one, as an example of a prototype, so they knew the typical course of action right away. Their experience let them identify a reasonable reaction as the first one they considered, so they did not bother thinking of others. They were not being perverse. They were being skillful. We now call this strategy *recognition-primed decision making*."<sup>1</sup>

Klein says that the Recognition-Primed Decision Making Model fuses two processes: the way decision makers' size up the situation to recognize which course of action makes sense, and the way they evaluate the course of action by imagining it.<sup>2</sup> It is important to keep in mind that decisions evolve with circumstances. While some decisions are made simply, with more time to decide, other decisions require quick if-then thinking in order to achieve results. The focus here is how to prepare the law enforcement and security professions to make those rapid decisions that need to be made under pressure.

Often times, law enforcement and security personnel are required to make decisions with very little information available, and even less time to be had. This time deficit can occur for a number of reasons, but is most likely a result of the following: the unfolding of rapidly changing circumstances that allow little time for making a decision, or, an individual officer, who is locked into a complacent mindset, is caught unprepared and therefore misses critical information that has been unfolding progressively. In both cases, decision making is difficult due to the lack-of information that is being picked up on, as well as the lack-of time that is available to process that information. Law enforcement and security officers find themselves in these types of situations all too often. If not prepared through training, education and experience, and, if the leaders of these professions fail to possess a strong enough character, time sensitive decisions do not get made properly and effectively, and the advantage then goes to the adversary.

In order to gather and process the incoming information in rapidly changing circumstances, judgment and decision making without all of the facts is required. (*Actually due to intuition built through experience we gain situational awareness, meaning there is a lot of information an experienced decision maker uses, it was just not available to us in earlier stages*<sup>3</sup>). In order to pick up on this information and the signs and signals, individual Boyd Cycles must be turned on. The Boyd Cycle (OODA-LOOP) is a reflection of the decision and action cycles that are utilized in making decisions throughout daily routines. These cycles can result from subconscious and conscious acts of observation and orientation. Col

Boyd explained a person in a conflict as such: any conflicted person must **observe** the environment, to include himself, his adversary, the moral, mental and physical situation, potential allies and opponents. He must **orient** to what it all means, “what’s going on” which is part of the ongoing process throughout the situation. Orientation involves the information observed, ones genetic heritage, social environment and prior experiences (birth-present) that forms a picture of the situation. The results one forms during the orientation phase must be **decided** upon and an attempt need be made to carry out the decision, and finally, he must **act**.<sup>4</sup>

An example where one might use The Boyd Cycle would be when driving a car, which combines both mental and physical skills. To elaborate: while driving we make hundreds of subconscious and conscious decisions as to what other drivers will and will not do based on the signs and signals they display. If we *observe* a turn signal or brake light come on in front of us, we *orient* to that signal, and, in turn, make a conscious *decision* to slow ourselves down; once the decision has been made, we *act* accordingly because we know that taking the proper actions will avoid accidents and keep traffic flowing. When something happens unexpectedly while driving, we observe the information and quickly make intuitive subconscious decisions. By taking decisive actions while driving in unexpected situations—actions such as swerving to a safe part of the road, or stopping quickly, we avoid any hazards from occurring. However, if we are not paying attention—having a spirited conversation, dialing a cell phone or are distracted in some other way, problems arise, near misses happen, and accelerated stopping and accidents occur. Why? Because there is a break in a properly running Boyd Cycle, causing us to miss critical information.

The driving example is a very good one to utilize because it combines cognitive and physical abilities that are necessary in order to be a successful driver. When one considers the number of cars on the road versus the number of accidents, it can be concluded that we are, overall, skilled at combining cognitive and physical skills because we use them all the time. This practice translates into experience, and we, in turn, become skilled in picking up both the obvious and subtle signs. This practiced ability results in increased situational awareness while driving, which, in turn, translates into very good conscious and subconscious decision making. The driving analogy is important to consider because it shows the correlation between doing and developing experience while using both our cognitive and physical abilities to carry out our daily tasks.

The aforementioned analogy relates directly to what the law enforcement and security professions do when carrying out their duties day

to day. It also shows the importance of continuous training (driving everyday) and its effect on developing this ability in those who deal with crime, crime problems and dangerous encounters. Critical decision makers involved in law enforcement and security should aim to achieve the following goals: to combine the ability to develop the cognitive decision making process with the physical skills required in both progressive and spontaneous circumstances, and to refine the necessary methods through experience, applying methods accordingly—based on both the environment and current circumstances. The first step to achieving these goals is a shift of mind. Intuition is defined as “the way we translate our experience into action.” Our experiences allow us recognize what is going on (making judgments) and how to react (making decisions). Our experiences enable us to recognize what to do and we can make decisions rapidly and without conscious awareness or effort. We do not have to think through situations in order to make a good decision.<sup>5</sup> To elaborate, intuition is not magic, not some strange force that comes from some unknown mystical location; but rather, intuition comes from refined senses that, in turn, lead to rapid decision making cycles. These rapid decision making cycles are developed through tough and continuous development in decision making exercises.

Recognition-primed decision making is guided and controlled through tactical judgments based on individual perceptions as circumstances unfold. Recognition-primed decision making can be enhanced through training, and by achieving an understanding that conflict is time competitive—requiring us to use **o**bservation, **o**rientation, and our **d**ecision and **a**ction cycles quickly yet effectively. This kind of training is what COL John Boyd called; “Implicit guidance and control.” In his work, the late Colonel John Boyd concluded that conflict is time competitive observation, orientation, and decision and action cycles. Boyd’s decision making cycle has been proven in its ability to give the upper hand, the clear advantage, to the person with the fastest O-O-D-A cycle. The word implicit is used throughout Boyd’s work, and can be understood as tactical judgment and intuitive decision making.

In members of law enforcement and security, these types of decision making skills are necessary to aid in efforts to confront and resolve crime and violence. In dangerous and rapidly unfolding circumstances, there is no time for contemplation and analytical decision making; by the time you stop and contemplate, ponder an idea, and come up with a solution, it may be too late. The real world of crime and violence is not a classroom or boardroom model where there is time to strategize and come up with a plan. It is clear that members of law enforcement

and security must recognize forming patterns and respond by using implicit information if they are to be successful; this is not to say that they do not use explicit information gathered when the time and information is available. There is a balance between explicit and implicit information—law enforcement officers do their homework and gather information in accordance with what is unfolding at the time. This is both an art and science developed by education, training and experience, and it alludes to the critical importance of understanding conflict and the strategy and tactics essential in resolving conflict. However, what is not as clear is an understanding as to how to explain intuitive decisions. Why is being able to explain decisions important? Aside from the obvious answer, which is so those who sit in review of the decisions can understand how and why a critical decision was made, are the less obvious answers, answers such as: so that the citizenry, who participate in review boards and sit on juries, have a better understanding as to how tactical judgments are used to decide reactions; and, so that those in leadership positions within the law enforcement and security professions, and also those who conduct investigations, can examine the critical decisions that have been made by frontline law enforcement and security professionals. In the heat of the moment, decisions are thoroughly and fairly investigated. These investigations are not only conducted with the available physical evidence provided at the scene of an incident, but also take into account how conflicts unfold and how individuals process information and perceive circumstances as they unfold.

This knowledge, regarding how we process information and make decisions, is critical to both understand and to consider if justice is to prevail. The most important reason that this knowledge must be acquired is so that the individuals in law enforcement and security can deal with the aftermath of an incident through understanding that decisions made on the fly, in rapidly changing circumstances, do not match the analytical models. Analytical models are done when there is plenty of time. This allows for an analysis and synthesis to take place in the static environment of a classroom or in a living room watching a media report of the circumstances. Proper conditioning accounts for a clearly different process; this kind of training causes our physiology to shift from a frontal lobe, conscious thinking, analytical being, and allows for a mid-brain, subconscious, instinctive reaction—responding through operant conditioning to meet the challenge or threat.

In today's world, explicit and clear answers are expected after a response, even if it is a use of force situation, or an officer handling a suspicious person, or a response to a natural disaster to save lives. How

do law enforcement and security professionals explain what they did not what was “thought about,” so that others understand? Intuition, or implicit judgment, appears simple to understand but is not an easily acquired skill. The words intuition and implicit almost imply there is something missing. This term implies an unscientific or haphazard approach. In conflict, one plus one does not equal two, but we live in a world where there is an explicit answer to every situation—yet in the real world of conflict that is not the case. You put two people together who disagree and you cannot predict what’s going to happen, let alone the chance of conflicting individuals getting so angry that they decide to get physical, or worse, deadly. In conflict there are often factors such as chaos, uncertainty, disorder, and friction that confuse and slow down the decision making cycle. You cannot predict exactly what’s going to happen next, because there are things going on that you cannot see or hear. For example: the numerous thoughts going through an adversaries mind: *“I will do what I am asked,” “I will not do what I am asked,” “I will escape,” “I will fight,” “I will assault,” “I will kill,” “I will play dumb until...,” “I will stab,” “I will shoot,” “he looks prepared I will comply,” “he looks complacent I will not comply,” etc.* It is important to remember that the adversary has his own objectives; also, they have plans as does the other side of the conflict, therein creating further conflict. In conflict,  $1+1=?$  If one side pauses to try and figure out (analysis) what’s happening or gather more explicit (precise) information, it could be over with unfavorable results. Therefore, the obvious need for conditioning for tactical judgment or implicit guidance and control is absolutely necessary.

A problem often arises in the heat of the moment when members of law enforcement and security personnel are perceived as unreasonable or wrong by others. They responded with what they perceived as happening based on the unfolding circumstances, and after all was said and done, their perceptions were inaccurate. What they thought was a gun turned out to be a wallet, or a cell phone. Who they thought was the suspect was an innocent bystander. This is worst case scenario; however, in this worst case scenario the professionals can still be justified in their actions, based on the circumstances. What about the body language that was observed?—the signs that the citizen was becoming anxious and they were fearful of an assault. As such, the officer took initiative to control the situation and the citizen responded by becoming physically assaultive. In turn, the officer took control with reasonable physical force, and suddenly a complaint was filed and the officer found himself under investigation for excessive force. What about the citizen who verbally abused the officer while in their professional capacity? As such, the officer decided to strategically raise his voice and

use verbal manipulation to gain control. In turn, the officer was faced with a complaint investigation.

How are these examples explained appropriately? How does the lack of understanding, by law enforcement and security professionals, regarding quick, critical decision making affect them while in the moment and under pressure? Furthermore, how does it affect those who sit in judgment of these decisions? Why is it important to understand and be able to explain it? How and who gets trained to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the decisions that are made, for all involved? How will all of this enhance the law enforcement and security professionals and their abilities to perform under pressure and become better intuitive decision makers?

## **Critical Decision Making Under Pressure**

### ***Part 2***

#### ***Explicit versus Implicit Information in Critical Decision Making***

In part one of this series, recognition primed decision making, the Boyd Cycle, and the importance of training in the development of the decision making process were discussed. In this part, several questions will be answered; some such questions include: what is implicit and explicit information? How decisions are made, based on one type of information versus the other, or a combination of both types of information received? How does the lack of understanding of conflict and decision making affect decisions that are made in the real world while under pressure? After these decisions have been made, how are they explained to all affected by those decisions (leadership, citizenry, organization, juries)? How and who gets trained and educated so that there is a clear understanding of the decisions that were made? Finally, how will this educational process enhance the abilities of law enforcement and security professionals to perform under pressure and become better decision makers?

In the law enforcement and security professions most of the little training conducted surrounds physical skills training. Training focuses on firearm proficiency, how to swing and block with an impact weapon, use oleoresin capsicum (Pepper Spray), defensive tactics and handcuffing techniques. A small portion of time is spent talking about use of force decisions and filing appropriate reports as to the action taken by officers. Although there have been great strides in bringing new training techniques to combine the physical and mental realms of conflict, such as: Redman suits, simmunitions, and range 3000 simulators. While this kind of training is excellent, it is just a small part of the

overall conditioning that must take place in the preparation of law enforcement and security professionals. This type of response training is called conditioned response. It is a specific kind of training for a specific kind of reaction, and while it is important, it does not fully prepare people for complex situations.

Decisions are made in two ways (as exposed in part 1). They can be done through analytical thought, when time is plenty and the circumstances allow for a detailed analysis and synthesis of gathered explicit information, or, they are also made intuitively under pressure when time is critical and only implicit information can be gathered to resolve critical incidents. In order to understand how decisions are made, it is important to understand the nature of how law enforcement and security professionals gather explicit and implicit information, as well as how they combine these kinds of information when making decisions.

### ***Decision Making and Explicit information***

Rapid decision making is essential to the law enforcement and security officer; an officer who is unable to make a timely decision puts himself and those around him in danger. Generally, most people were raised to make decisions after careful consideration and contemplation. Phrases such as: "Think before you act," or "What were you thinking?," or "Didn't you think it through?" are things that most people have all heard from parents, teachers, co-workers, and bosses. In the case of law enforcement and security, such phrases have been heard from internal investigators and review boards throughout their lives, when their decisions come into question.

There has been extensive research on the topic of cognitive development. One of the models used in decision making is the Adaptive Leadership Methodology (ALM), developed by Donald Vandergriff and his cadre in teaching new leaders in the Army ROTC program. ALM was developed by research, transformation and implementation, and has been accepted by the Army with the United States Military Academy at West Point. West Point has rewritten their lesson plans in its Department of Military Instruction (DMI) following the ALM model. In his book *Raising the Bar: Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, Vandergriff describes methods of decision making. The first method, "The Military Decision Making Process (MDMP)," is described by Vandergriff as the classical or analytical approach:

"the MDMP is a very good example of an analytical decision-making process; it is the first of two primary decision making models. Analytical methods such as the MDMP are formal problem solving techniques. The U.S. Army's MDMP is a modification

of the French Army's misinterpretation of a German Army Decision-making training approach in the late 1800s. In the U.S. Army's model, the decision-maker uses an analytical decision making process to reach logical decisions based upon a thorough analysis of the mission and situation. The MDMP as well as other analytical decision-making models use the same basic problem solving methodology."<sup>6</sup>

An example of this is the problem oriented policing, problem solving process SARA: **scanning**-identifying the problem; **analysis**-learning the problem's causes, scope and effects; **response**-acting to alleviate the problem; and **assessment**-determining whether the response worked. The SARA Problem-Solving Model is employed by most law enforcement agencies and provides techniques for identifying the elements of the problem, techniques to support the search for the underlying causes of the problem, and techniques for the development of the most effective strategy to address the problem. The final phase of the model highlights the requirement to assess the final results, and to determine if the response was effective. The SARA Model is widely applicable to problems faced by many neighborhoods and has produced excellent results for hundreds of communities across the United States. It establishes a collaborative, systematic process to address issues of community, safety, and quality of life. This approach is very good when the time for gathering, pondering and analyzing is plenty. Explicit (precise) information is gathered, reviewed, analyzed, and discussed by a collaborative group of police, business owners, and community members. Decisions are made as to what strategies and tactics to utilize, then a plan is developed and put into action. The plan is under constant assessment so that adjustments can be made in order to make the plan effective. The key here is there is "TIME" to get explicit and detailed information, and to walk through the process to achieve desired results. Explicit decisions are needed when trying things, or experimenting to resolve progressively evolving problems of the community. In order to resolve these types of issues, intuitive decisions are not needed (exclusively) because time is available. A big factor in this type of problem solving, and a big reason behind the need for explicit information, is that it gives ample amounts of time to develop trust amongst the group, which is sometimes lacking in communities, and can be a problem for rapid decision making.

### ***Rapid Decision-Making and Implicit Information***

When the focus has turned to critical decisions that need to be made and the limited amount of time to make these decisions even more critical, as is the case in use of force decision making, most

decisions must be made intuitively. These intuitive decisions are made rapidly, based on implicit (understood) information or tactical judgments. These decisions are made by using the patterns learned from experience (birth-present), along with the new information being gathered, as well as analyzing and synthesizing in the rapidly changing circumstances. This leads to a second type of decision-making model—a naturalistic or heuristic model. As presented by Vandergriff:

“Experience has much to do with this method of decision-making. There are three key steps inherent in heuristic decision-making: experience the situation in a changing context, recognize the pattern of the problem from personal knowledge and experience, and implement a solution. Although this is commonly used decision-making approach, heuristic and naturalistic models for decision-making have only recently come into prominence in decision-making literature.<sup>7</sup>”

Security and law enforcement officers use the rapid decision-making process by recognizing the signs and signals of crime and danger intuitively, or through what the protection professions refer to as the sixth sense. The sixth sense is intuition based on experience. “Intuition is how we translate our experiences into action.<sup>8</sup>”

Again, the car analogy will be used as an example. It is a freezing cold, snowy night and the roads are covered with snow and ice. You are traveling at 40 mph on a narrow curvy road. Your mind is set on getting home after a long shift. As you come into a sharp corner your vehicle begins to slide out of control. As you feel your heart rate pick up, your hands lock onto the steering wheel and your foot goes to the brake automatically due to the fear of an accident and your attempts to avoid one. Your experience is that you have lived in this wintery environment your whole life and have driven the icy, snow covered roads countless times before. Your intuition kicks in with “this is BAD!” You intuitively release or pump your foot on the brake, steer towards the direction of the slide, and drive through the problem to safety. When you’re once again safe, then your heart rate comes back down to normal and you breathe a sigh of relief. The conscious mind comes back to you, giving you a scolding for being complacent and driving too fast for the conditions.

Vandergriff continues:

“Experience is a reliable guide when it is relevant to the contemporary and future operating environment and missions, and when it’s filtered, processed and stored in the brain using enduring

principles and useful, reliable thought models. When key elements of the operating environment, opponents, technology and missions change rapidly, how experience is translated into intuition is even more important.<sup>9</sup>”

Failure to use rapid intuitive decision-making in circumstances where it is required can be deadly. It is critical that the law enforcement and security professions take slices of important information, called pattern recognition, make decisions and take the best option if they are to survive dangerous and deadly encounters.

The following scenario has been used, personally, in training for 8 years; it is a tragic example of what can happen when decision-making is indecisive.

*A young officer with about 1 year on the job observes a motor vehicle for speeding on the highway. The speed of the vehicle is approximately 98mph. The officer pursues the vehicle as it gets off the highway to secondary roads. The offender does not appear to be trying to escape, just traveling at such a speed, the driver fails to notice the pursuing officer initially; however, eventually, the vehicle takes notice and pulls over in a remote area. It is important to note that this is a very remote area of the country, and back-up is a long way off (at least 20 miles).*

*Once stopped, both the officer and the traffic violator exit their vehicles. The violator, a male in his fifties, walks towards the officer. The officer says: “Good Morning Sir” and they exchange pleasantries. The officer observes the subject has his hands in his pockets and tells him: “Sir takes your hands out of your pockets.” The subject asks: “Why?” The officer responds: “Take your hands out of your pockets sir.” The subject, in a display of complete frustration, anxiety, non-compliance and contempt, starts to do what can be described as an Irish gig in the middle of the road, all the while telling the officer: “Here I am, here I am, shoot my \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_!”*

*This behavior continues for 30 seconds, and then the subject approaches the officer exclaiming; “I am a \_\_\_\_\_ Vietnam combat veteran,” as a struggle ensues. The subject is struck by the officer’s impact weapon, only to walk away towards his vehicle and open the door. All the while the officer is ordering him to “Get Back. Get back. Sir, get back. Sir, get back here to me!” The subject is standing at the operator’s driver’s side door leaning inside while retrieving something. The officer is keeping his distance and giving orders to get back. The officer notices the subject has a long gun (M-1 carbine) in his hand and orders him: “Sir put the gun down.” He radios for back up and continues to tell the subject, “Sir put the gun down; put it down now sir.” The subject shouts back an emphatic “NO!”*

*The officer continues several more times to order the subject to put the gun down, and then they exchange shots. The subject fires suppressive fire to keep*

*the officer at bay while moving to avoid the officer's shots and close the distance. The officer and subject continue to exchange gun fire until the subject's rounds finally strike. While the young officer is struck he continues to order the subject to put the gun down. The officer continues the fight and hits the subject center mass, but the subject is able to reload his firearm. After the subject has reloaded, he shoots while moving and kills the young officer on the roadside. He then walks towards his personal vehicle while shouting obscenities at the officer.*

In the end 60 rounds exchanged—33 by the subject and 27 by the officer; the subject hit the officer a total of ten times, and the officer struck the subject once. The young officer involved died at the scene. The subject escaped and was apprehended the next day.

This video, when used for training, has a powerful affect on the instructor and the officers of law enforcement and security. This incident is a catalyst for personal research on decision making. Please keep in mind that the review of this incident is intended strictly for learning lessons, and is in no way meant to dishonor the memory of a fallen brother officer. Any given day it could be one of those involved in law enforcement and security due to lack of decisive decision-making. The unfortunate events that unfolded in the aforementioned incident were about decision making, or lack thereof, despite all the physical aspects involved in the conflict. At the core of this tragic incident was a failure to make decisions and seize the initiative. This is an example of where rapid intuitive decision making could have, should have, and would have ended in the favor of the officer—why? What made him indecisive and therefore ineffective in this case? Take a look at this fact: from the time the rifle was first seen to the first round being fired was 30 seconds. Thirty seconds does not seem like a very long time, but in a hostile situation that is a lifetime. When reviewing this incident and the decisions involved, it is important not to get lost in the gun fight. It should have never gone that far. Lets break this down so we can see the importance of understanding the decision making process based on experience gathered in this line of work.

The subject was stopped for speeding; once stopped he exits his vehicle, which, agree or disagree with this action, is a common practice known as a “walk back” in this part of the country. Once the conversation ensues and the request for the subject to remove his hands from his pockets ends in a diatribe of unusual behavior, such as: Irish gig in the roadway, shouting “here I am; here I am; shoot my \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_!” This behavior turns to assault on the officer, and the subject walks away, back to his vehicle. As this is happening, intuitively, the officer's mind should have been screaming: “**BOLD action is required.**” Bold

action translates into several options, such as: (1) I cannot not handle this guy alone, he is too strong. I must disengage and regroup with back-up. (2) I can handle him physically and I must use reasonable and necessary force to control the subject. I must act now and choose one of the two options before the situation escalates out of control (i.e., gun appears). When the subject walks to his vehicle, he retrieves and readies a rifle. After several orders to put the weapon down, the subject refuses and assaults the officer with lethal force. Again, bold action is required: (1) close distance with subject while he is in the process of readying the weapon and if he does not comply deadly force would be reasonable and necessary. (2) Seek cover and engage with deadly force. (3) Drive into, the non-compliant tactical advantage seeking and escalating to the imminent threat of deadly force subject. (4) Disengage from the suspect to a safe cover location remembering rifle verses pistol gives advantage to the subject. Continue to monitor with available resources, insuring public safety. Then a more detailed explicit plan can be implemented.

Why was the officer indecisive? Unfortunately, we will never know for sure what the young officer was thinking. Various responses from veteran officers involved in trying circumstances such as this have said the following regarding indecisive behavior: poor training, liability concerns, no leadership backing, no community backing, never thought it would happen to him (complacency), reluctance in taking a human life, being disciplined for using force etc. These are a select few of the most common responses heard and discussed as far as factors surrounding indecisiveness. What Klein and Vandergriff have discovered through hundreds of observations and the study of decision making in complex environments, is that people fail because they have not been prepared properly for this situation. What is considered as conventional training does not fit the bill. The training aspect will be discussed below; the other responses listed as factors in indecisiveness are all part of what's known as friction—*“Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult.” (Graham, 1873)* In the decision making aspect of conflict, any unthought-of or unresolved issues or concerns will slow the decision making cycle down, in an attempt to analyze these issues in the midst of a crisis situation, causing an overload of the senses and indecisiveness. In these intense situations, under pressure and the survival stress response kicks in—an automatic response takes place, shifting thought, from the frontal lobe (analytical thinking) to mid-brain (intuitive thinking). According to Vandergriff it is not automatic, just faster, and conditioned through doing many complex scenarios, none of which are the same (each followed by constructive feedback sessions called After Action Reviews or AARs). A high stress

situation causes chemical changes in the brain that cause one to think and act differently than when under normal conditions. Most of those involved in traumatic situations give little or no thought to their behavior; they instinctively do what their experience has programmed them to do, through education, training and preparation. In this scenario it appears as though the young officer is over thinking the issue and hence he is confused and indecisive. He is unable to adapt in time to take effective action.

The ability to adapt to changing conditions in rapidly changing circumstances, and to seize the initiative, requires the ability to think on your feet. As Vandergriff explains:

“Adaptability is an effective change in response to an altered situation. Adaptability is not speed of reaction, but the slower, more deliberate processes associated with problem solving.<sup>10</sup>”

This is where the observation and the ongoing process, orientation phase of the Boyd Cycle comes into play. In this case, the young officer should have been making the observations using all of his senses, including intuition. Obviously, the officer saw everything unfold; however, he failed to absorb the information effectively and to orient to the magnitude of the threat unfolding in front of him. When the survival stress response instinctively kicked in, this failure to adapt caused a form of paralysis. One might ask: “if it’s instinctive, why did he not do something?” The answer is that the officer did not act quickly enough because he was not trained properly in rapid decision making. In this case, the officer’s indecisiveness should not be attributed to complacency, because he initially appeared alert and aware—ordering hands out of pockets, etc., in an attempt to gain some semblance of control. Once the circumstances went outside the normal training of what the officer had received, the officer was unable to be decisive. The point being that this problem rests not with the young, conscientious and brave officer; but rather, the out of date training in the law enforcement and security professions. Please be reminded that there remains a place in the law enforcement and security professions for training; however, to be dependent upon the current training alone puts the profession decades behind, especially considering what is now known concerning different training techniques. The law enforcement and security professions should do all that they can to learn from this incident and others like it, in an effort to evolve and adapt their approach and response strategies and tactics. Training in decision making, specifically deciding under pressure, should be a staple of training for all law enforcement and security officers.

***The Winning Combination: Gathering Explicit and Implicit Information***

In the heat of a rapidly changing set of circumstances where risk is high, it is imperative that law enforcement and security professionals process information implicitly via the Boyd Cycle in order to gain the edge and seize the initiative. It is also critical to discuss situations where risk is low and time is prevalent for gathering detailed information and thoughtful analysis. These efforts are necessary in order to allow for the proper implementation of specific plans to fit the circumstances, or problems, that the law enforcement and security professions are facing.

In the previous sections, a lot was said about the use of implicit information and rapid decision making, particularly how there is no time for analytical processing of information—and that is true of the spontaneous and unexpected circumstances that law enforcement and security professionals are often faced with as they carry out their duties. On the other end of things, what about the situations when these professionals do have time on their side? Situations such as when they are planning a dangerous mission, or, if in law enforcement, when preparing and issuing a high risk warrant, or, if a security officer, when responding to an individual who may be potentially violent in the workplace. None of these examples presents significant danger to the individuals involved, and, as pointed out earlier, TIME is on their side. To elaborate, in this type of situation law enforcement and security professionals can take their time—they can do thorough background and intelligence investigations to learn all they can about the individual in question. After gathering and analyzing the information collected, the professionals can notify employers in efforts to prepare a plan and intervene, based on current practices. In law enforcement, precautions can be taken, and highly trained response teams can be called out. They can put a detailed plan together, deciding when and where they want to put the plan into action. They can put all the right personnel in all the right places before implementing any action. They can prepare by doing their homework and gathering all the explicit details, and so on. Once all the proper contacts have been made and the plan goes into action, the implicit side of the equation is back at the forefront; reason being, because good plans should actually resemble biology instead of engineering—that is, good plans should evolve. The preparation and planning cannot take into account the silent evidence, namely, the thoughts and motivations going on in the mind of an adaptive individual with his own ideas and plans; therefore, the right personal development is to include training in the Boyd Cycle, which leads to situational awareness and adaptation, as long as the plan is allowed to evolve. Hence, law enforcement and security professionals

must be prepared to adapt to the changing circumstances, and, in this case, all the tools and personnel are on scene and are ready to take whatever action is necessary, based on the subject's response. This is the combination of explicit and implicit information gathering. The use of both decision making models (explicit and implicit) provides the opportunities for law enforcement and security professionals to gain every advantage in setting up the environment and individuals for success.

This kind of preparation can be done on the fly, as well as in a variety of circumstances, by slowing down and utilizing "if/then thinking." For example, while en route to calls such as a domestic violence call or an alarm call, use that time for "if/then thinking" as it relates to approach strategies. Try parking down the street a few hundred yards and approaching on foot to the alarm or domestic—it is amazing how much more explicit information can be observed, ultimately improving orientation as to what is going on in that particular situation. Often times, law enforcement and security professionals take too many "tactically troubled" short cuts, and sometimes pay with the loss of life. These professionals need to give themselves the necessary advantages by setting themselves up to respond. Good luck needs to stop being mistaken for good tactics—the law enforcement and security professions need to harness every possible way to adapt, learn and evolve, in order to make better decisions that will yield more tactically savvy techniques, ultimately providing the edge that the professions need.

## **Critical Decisions Making: Under Pressure**

### ***Part 3***

#### ***Creating and Nurturing the Decision Making Environment***

##### **Complexity of Decisions**

The idea of recognized primed decision making and the importance of understanding and utilizing the Boyd Cycle to process implicit and explicit information have previously been discussed. In parts 1 and 2, several examples were used regarding where and how this applies to the everyday work of law enforcement and security professionals. Also discussed were two ways that individuals process information analytically, when time is plenty and risk is lower, as well as intuitively made decisions when time is scarce and risk is high. These discussions lead to an understanding that critical decisions can be complex—especially in environments where there is conflict, and competitive minds collide. After a decision is made, there is often a struggle to explain responses appropriately. Decision makers often have problems articulating their

decisions and actions, and, in turn, those who review the decisions struggle to understand the action. This leads to unnecessary suspicion from investigators and frustration on the part of the decision maker. This fact creates problems in the individual decision maker and their ability to make future decisions, as well as effects the whole organization and their decision making capabilities, because it results in confusion, uncertainty and mistrust over what is a good or bad decision. Officers are often told they made a bad decision, are disciplined over it, and told to *“get out there and handle it right the next time.”* There is often no explanation as to why the decision was bad, or how he/she may do it better, just to *“get out there and do what’s right.”* This is unacceptable; this creates friction and slows down the decision making cycle, which is dangerous and leads to an ineffective organization. This is not acceptable in professions where life and death are part of the mix. More knowledge and understanding of how conflict unfolds and how decisions are made must be sought in order to become more effective at making and reviewing those decisions.

The term “complexity theory” can be used in an effort to understand the dynamic nature of conflict and decision making:

“Briefly put, complexity theory postulates how complex systems are capable of generating simple patterns, and conversely, how simple systems are capable of displaying complex behaviors.”  
(Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, 2006)<sup>11</sup>

An understanding of complexity theory and how it relates to the complex nature of humans and human behavior in competitive environments is necessary in order to explain, or gain an understanding and comprehension of, the environment, behaviors and events. The definition of complexity fits perfectly in the world of law enforcement and security, where rapid decision making is necessary to fulfill our obligations to protect and serve the community or organization. In order to make a decision in a competitive environment or to understand what happened if reviewing or investigating the circumstances surrounding a decision, one must consider that conflict is a complex phenomenon full of uncertainties. Furthermore, that a vast array of other problematic factors can cause friction and, in turn, slow decision making down. It must also be understood that small changes in the individuals, the environment, and in the situation itself, can produce significantly larger outcomes—such as winning or losing, or even life or death. What follows will focus on how the law enforcement and security professions can effectively create an environment of good decision makers. An organization must develop sound decision makers

in an environment that includes ongoing development through innovative training and the nurturing of strong character. Let it be noted that strength of character is the bedrock of rapid decision making.

### Training

One of the best resources regarding the training and leadership aspects of developing rapid decision making is Don Vandergriff's book: *Raising the Bar: Creating and Nurturing Adaptability in the Changing Face of War*. Vandergriff has spent years researching and fine tuning his methods of learning and education in the United States Army. Vandergriff's leadership model, called Adaptive Leader Methodology (ALM), for developing rapid decision makers was referenced early in the discussion. As the author notes, after all is said and done in a rapidly changing circumstance, it often comes down to the idea that decision-makers are forced to think on their feet, or, to "adapt" to the situation as best as possible. Vandergriff defines adaptability as: "an effective change in response to an altered situation. Adaptability is not speed of reaction, but the slower, more deliberate processes associated with problem solving."<sup>12</sup> In other words, to be effective on the street, one must be able to process information under pressure quickly yet deliberately. Through continual development with varied scenarios and constant feedback from mentors, peers and instructors, professionals can learn to pick up on signs and signals that signify change is taking place—and then they will be better able to respond accordingly. The type of development Vandergriff speaks of enables an individual to synthesize multiple courses of action faster in a given situation, and then pick an appropriate one, and then finally, act on it. This is the orientation part of Boyd's OODA loop, and it is the most important part; once an individual orients themselves to the key aspects of what they have observed, the decision and action components become much easier to handle effectively.

In order to effectively meet and deal with the types of crime, crime problems, conventional and unconventional threats that the law enforcement and security professions face, they must develop and nurture mutual trust and strength of character within their organizations and their communities. This is necessary to enable effective decisions, especially decisions under pressure. "Raising the Bar" describes key characteristics of adaptive individuals; these characteristics are critical to possess if the professionals of law enforcement and security are to be successful. They are further critical to allow for change to begin occurring in both the internal and external cultures which affect how law enforcement and security professionals respond and deal with the serious issues that they all face.

*Vandergriff's approach develops adaptability in leaders focusing on five areas:*

**Intuitive**-this enables rapid decision-making without conscious awareness or effort;

**Critical thinker**-the ability to achieve understanding, evaluates viewpoints, and solves problems;

**Creative Thinker**-equally important, called *fingerspitzengefühl* or the feeling in the tip of one's fingers (Napoleon called it a "gut" feeling);

**Self-Aware**-an understanding of one's own strengths and weaknesses;

**Social Skills**-the ability, to assess people's strengths and weaknesses, the use of communication skills, and the art of listening.

These characteristics are critical to being a good decision maker and adaptive individual. The characteristics listed above have been talked about in the law enforcement and security professions for years—let's develop and etch them at the forefront of our minds by conducting valuable training and setting high standards that focus on these characteristics. As mentioned earlier, there have been efforts made in the area of cognitive/physical training which use force on force role plays, simunitions and simulators, and they all serve as great tools to enhance this effort. However, at the heart of all this training, or as Vandergriff says "development," is the ability for instructors to facilitate the after-action review at the close of each event or situation.

The problem faced in law enforcement and security is that the vast majority of officers do not receive the training due to budget constraints, short staffs and the nature of what they do (little time available); however, the biggest obstacle to this type of development is cultural. Once again, a *mindset shift* is needed regarding how and when we train to develop these characteristics and skills that are absolutely necessary. Surprisingly, as advanced as Vandergriff's model appears to be, it requires little resources, just very good instructors who understand its principles and how to teach within the framework of Boyd's OODA loop.

#### Mindset Shift...Take Advantage of Time

As discussed in Part One, COL John Boyd described conflict as time competitive observation, orientation, decision and action cycles (Boyd, December 1986).<sup>13</sup> These time competitive cycles should also be

considered in preparation for future encounters, taking advantage of available time throughout shifts to train and develop decision makers.

Most agencies do not spend the time or money on training frontline personnel and agencies that do send their personnel to training send them to a one day, a two day, or a week long training class that uses out of date methods of learning (i.e., competency theory focused on short term memorization presented using power point lectures, etc.). While these types of training classes are good for short term accomplishment, they do not promote long term, continued learning. The problems with these types of classes are two-fold: (1) training is conducted with outdated learning models and (2) in most cases agencies cannot afford to send enough personnel to get an organizational benefit from the training. If an agency can afford to send everyone, they can only send them once with no follow-up. The problem with this is that the skills learned perish quickly, due to a lack of conditioning through repetitive training. Hence, when the benefits of cognitive and physical training are perishable, it becomes a waste of time and money. If law enforcement and security professionals are to be successful in creating and nurturing these types of skills, it is going to take repetition and constant work to enable any real, long term benefits.

The *shift of mindset* comes into play when changing a culture. There are numerous examples of how this shift can occur, for example, taking advantage of downtime during a working shift, such as roll call, to train. Extended roll calls mount time by 15-20 minutes—why not consider using uncommitted time on the shift to conduct a mini-training scenario with Tactical Decision Games (TDGs). Another idea would be to train during actual physical training. Vandergriff has written an entire annex in a handbook on how to develop adaptability while developing the physical aspect of our profession. Regardless, some of this development must also be up to individual initiative.

### Creating Decision Makers with Tactical Decision Games (TDGs)

A highly effective method of training that develops rapid decision making is a tool called the Tactical Decision Game (TDG) or Decision Making Exercise (DME). This is a critical piece of Vandergriff's training methodology with the military. Vandergriff has achieved great results in using these games to develop decision makers who will demonstrate adaptability in combat. The author has received great feedback from those serving overseas regarding the benefits of the TDG's in creating decision makers performing for high stakes and under high pressure. Tactical decision games are situational exercises on paper that repre-

sent a snap shot in time, and can be conducted individually or in a group setting. For example: a scenario is handed out that describes a problem related to your profession (law enforcement, security, military, business, etc), and the facilitator sets a short time limit for you to come up with a solution to the problem presented. As soon as the time is up, an individual or group is told to present their course of action. *What did you do and why?* It is important that individuals or groups working together are candid in their responses, as they are only fooling themselves if done otherwise. The lesson learned from the TDGs can make law enforcement and security professionals more effective and safe in the performance of their jobs. The time to develop the strength of character and the courage to make critical decisions comes as a result of this example—in the training environment. In training, mistakes can be made that do not cost a life, and valuable lessons can be learned. The key here is the facilitator/instructor, whose job it is to ensure responses are brought out and lessons are learned from the scenarios. This form of valuable training can be done while working—it takes some effort, but can indeed be done.

The TDGs are effective at developing decision making in the field. In the few years that TGDs have been used in the Walpole police department, officers went from the initial thought of: *“what are we doing this for?”* to getting intricately involved in discussing the strategies and tactics necessary to resolving problems faced in the TDG setting. This training eventually evolved to applying what was learned to the street, while on the job and under pressure, situations such as: tactical response and approaches to calls, communications, utilization of tactical basics; contact/cover principle and cover and concealment; approach strategies; perimeter containment. Overall, officer safety was greatly improved as a result of utilizing these short scenarios. Furthermore, knowledge of laws and policy and procedure improved by utilizing decision making exercises to fit legal and policy questions. It is evident that this simple tool not only works, but works well. While the term “simple tool” is used, make no mistake, it is certainly hard work to implement and conduct these exercises. Developing scenarios and ensuring appropriate lessons are learned takes thought and innovation to guarantee that proper training takes place. The instructor/facilitator needs to understand his job, and that is to draw out answers, not to give them out. This point must be emphasized because the goal is to allow for critical decision makers and innovators, and not just simply to give answers, directions, and to create followers. The TDGs are about developing individual, initiative driven, frontline leaders who can make decisions that meet the mission of the agency. As Vandergriff explains:

“TDGs are used to teach leaders how to think and to train and reinforce established ways of doing something, such as task training. The techniques can be traced back at least to the Chinese general and military theorist Sun Tzu, who was advocating their use more than 2,500 years ago.” (Vandergriff, *From Swift To Swiss Tactical Decision Games and Their Place in Military Education and Performance Improvement*, 2006).

Another critical component to developing decision makers is the decision making critique (DMC) or After Action Review (AAR). The AAR is conducted after the decisions are made, and discussed after student responses. It is in this component that, again, the instructor/facilitator must draw out lessons learned from the group critique. To do so, the facilitator keys in on two aspects of the TDG: (1) was the decision made in a timely manner? Also, (2) what was the rationale of the student or group in making their decision? As Vandergriff continues to drill into students that attend his workshop, “it is not about the tactics but the decisions” when facilitating the discussion of a TDG.

The question may be raised regarding how often to conduct these exercises; it is imperative to keep in mind that the benefit of developing rapid decision makers comes from conditioning, and, like anything else, conditioning comes from repetition. However, different from task training (rote memorization), repetition means constantly changing the conditions while focusing on the five aspects of adaptability. Realistically, in an environment that has no specific training unit, and the person in charge of training has multiple tasks, it is undoubtedly challenging, but also undoubtedly worth the effort that it takes to conduct these exercises. That being said, following are some examples as to how a multi-tasking, understaffed agency can reap the benefits of conducting TDGs and developing adaptive personnel. In the law enforcement and security professions environment, the shifts make it tough to administer TDGs daily, but that is not to say that it cannot be done. For example, if it gets demanding and busy on the shift, staff can “*adapt*” accordingly, and handle the necessary call for service, then, when things slow down, the staff can get back to the TDG (it is a good idea to always have one ready for “opportunity training”). A method used that personally proved successful was as follows: 1 game per month, and 12 training evolutions that were not taught elsewhere. The result was that numerous lessons were learned from each TDG, and the training objectives and lessons learned did improve decision making and the tactical mindset of officers. Ultimately, there was a significant difference in responses to calls and how they were handled.

## How to conduct TDGs

Following is an example of a Tactical Decision Game:

It is 1 AM. You receive a dispatch reporting that a prisoner has escaped in a marked police unit, with a fellow officer's gun. The suspect is a female who is an emotionally disturbed prisoner that was returning after an evaluation from the hospital, being transported by a fellow officer. Ten minutes later it is reported that the prisoner has shown up at her sister's house, and that the sister has custody of "her" child. The prisoner kidnaps her own child and shoots and kills her sister's family dog. The prisoner leaves the scene and comes into contact with a fellow officer responding who is to the location. The prisoner drives toward the officer at a high rate of speed and hits the driver's side door. At this point, the officer has jumped out from his car and he shoots at the prisoner but misses. The prisoner continues to flee, crashes the car, and then flees on foot with her child. A search is commenced for 5 hours when, suddenly, the prisoner reappears in town, on the street, pointing the gun at a policeman while she holds her child in her arms. The prisoner begins to laugh and taunt and makes statements such as: *"I will shoot you,"* and points the gun at those around, including her child and the news media that is on scene. From a car length away, the officer begins to negotiate. The prisoner then states: *"I have ruined my life."*—as an officer, you are fixing to work a murder suicide.

*The facilitator gives instructions— how do you handle this situation? You have 30 seconds to decide. Begin...*

When the 30 seconds are up the facilitator picks individuals to give their responses. It will help if the facilitator gets the individuals up in front of the room to add a little pressure; the individuals will then be asked to explain what they did and why. This response session should be done individually, requiring that each participant discusses their course of action. When all the individuals have completed their discussion, the facilitator will require them to get in groups and talk and critique each response—everyone involved will be amazed at the learning that takes place.

When time is tight, TDGs can be done in a group setting, as opposed to individuals then groups. The facilitator gives the group the scenario and begins a discussion as to how it is handled. This is yet another example of "adaptability," changes due to time constraints, and still, there is time to get the lessons in. In the law enforcement and security professions, jobs are about change and adapting to those changes; it becomes the responsibility of the professions to take advantage of the time they have to better prepare for the dynamic encounters they face. Therefore, the goal should be to do more of this type of training—to take advantage of any down time available to get a TDG in, especially

when staffed with appropriate numbers of properly trained instructors (minimum 1 per shift). If the commitment is made, a game a week (52 per year) could easily be done. This commitment would be beneficial to all the individuals as well as the agency. It is time to begin to take advantage of actual calls and the lessons learned from them by utilizing After Action Reviews, which can most easily be understood as a TDG in reverse. In this case, an actual decision has been made, and a problem has been resolved (real world lessons). There is no more valuable training evolution than to take actual situations, break down the lessons learned from these situations, and adapt these lessons to a future response. The TDGs work, and work well, at developing decision makers and enhancing knowledge from past training.

To bring the training program to an even higher level of learning, programs should utilize the methods explained above as a tool to build experiences that will eventually turn into pattern recognition. The full programs of instruction Vandergriff describes consists of four primary pillars and includes the use of: (1) a case study learning method; (2) tactical decision games; (3) free play force on force exercises; and (4) feedback through the leader evaluation system. This complete comprehensive program of instruction unifies the approaches above in accomplishing learning objectives that include: improving one's ability to make decisions quickly and effectively; making sense of new situations, seeing patterns, and spotting opportunities and options that were not visible before; becoming more comfortable in a variety of situations; developing more advanced and ambitious tactics; and becoming more familiar with weapons capabilities, employment techniques, and other technical details. (Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, 2006). It is suggested to start with the case studies and TDGs, and build upon the program to develop the best decision makers possible. Once the TDGs have been facilitated, move into a force on force training environment, noting that all steps in the program are followed by a facilitated AAR.

#### Mutual Understanding Community/Protectors: Training Those We Serve

An important piece of decision making is the necessary element of law enforcement and security professionals being able to explain their decisions, and that necessity extends to being able to explain decisions to folks in the community or organizations who may not have a good understanding as to how these professionals decide under pressure. It has previously been discussed that when making intuitive decisions, based on implicit information gathered in high risk situations, there is little time available. While the law enforcement and security profes-

sionals understand the situation and the decision that took place, and they know what they did and why, they still may have a difficult time explaining what happened. Furthermore, the situations that these professionals face, and the decisions that they make, look understandably different to other types of professionals, namely, those who work in a safe environment, allowing plenty of time to analyze circumstances with an analytical mind. Therefore, explicit answers are sought as to the decisions made by law enforcement and security professionals.

The question remains: why do law enforcement and security professionals have a problem explaining themselves, and how do they make those outside of their profession understand? As Boyd has stated, the perceptions and orientations that people have are based on past experience, genetic heritage, cultural traditions, and unfolding circumstances (Boyd, December 1986). In other words, people see things based on the way they view the world. Can it then, in turn, be expected that the citizens outside of the law enforcement and security professions base their perceptions, and make their judgments, as a result of the communications on behalf of the abstract world of the media—such as news, movies, television and print—in which they are engulfed regularly? If judgments are made as such—based on something that the general public has heard, something that has never been disproved, something that they have never experienced, etc.—how can the general public begin to understand the real reasons behind these decisions, in such a way that the silent evidence (thought process, decision making, survival stress, etc.) is considered in the process? Again, the process should be training, training and being more open and honest as to what the law enforcement and security professionals do and why they do it.

Community and law enforcement organizations often encourage that the general public get to know the officers, however, if the officers stop, get out of their cars and have a conversation with someone, they can be seen as goofing off and not working. Likewise, if an officer is seen parked in their car on the roadside or in a parking lot conducting surveillance or traffic duties, again, the inference is that they are goofing off. While these examples seem (and are) simplistic, they often result in complaints, complaint investigations, and at times, reprimands of individual officers. Officers, in turn, begin to see the community they protect, whether a city or town, or the occupants of a facility, as fickle minded, and the community sees officers as out of touch. Community or organizational leadership often get wrapped up in the politics of all this and, in short, a great divide is formed. This divide leads to distrust on both sides, resulting in a sad reality for all, ending in a poor result.

In order to protect and serve effectively, law enforcement and security officials and the communities that they work in must come together. Training, education and learning are the keys to closing this divide. These concepts are nothing new—it's been written and talked about in the law enforcement realm for more than 30 years. As Vandergriff explains in his article: *From Swift to Swiss: Tactical Decision Games and Their Place in Military Education and Performance Improvement*, the foundation of experiential learning goes back centuries:

“In the late 1700s, Pestalozzi developed his theory that students would learn faster on their own if allowed to “experience the thing before they tried to give it a name.” TDGs were used to sharpen students’ decision-making skills and to provide a basis for evaluating them on their character.”

Based on the history, it is both fascinating and alarming that law enforcement and security professions are just recently beginning to conduct this type of training. In all fairness, there has been a multitude of training classes on community oriented policing and problem oriented policing, and classes have been conducted across the nation regarding the topic of building community trust. However, not much of this training focuses on decision making under pressure in use of force situations. Training the population in use of force decision making has been conducted in the LAPD program, and they have yielded great results in bridging the divide between protection professionals and the community as a result of this training. It is a process of communicating and sharing information on both sides of the spectrum, and helps each side to understand what is expected; it also provides an understanding as to how the officials conduct their work and do their jobs effectively.

The professions must continue to bridge the gap between protector and the citizenry. They can do this by offering more of the aforementioned LAPD-type of training such as: citizens police academies, working with community groups, schools, and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC). In each of these groups, all educate in their area of expertise; this is not done in attempts to create more experts, but in order to gain an understanding of what the group’s goals and objectives are, as well as what methods are utilized in making decisions. Suggestions for such training within the law enforcement and security fields would be as follows: to put citizens and community leaders in circumstances these professions handle and have them role play; use TDGs to give them a feel for the types of decisions we make; provide simple methods of education and learning. This is all necessary to create efforts that will bridge the gap, and is critical to help the public understand

how law enforcement and security professionals make decisions under pressure. This end result is that the community is interested and involved, and they understand the job that law enforcement and security professionals do as well as the risks and consequences involved.

### Leadership Roles in the Decision Making Process

Adapting to the changing conditions is what makes a true professional. Doing things the way they have always been done is fool hearted and unprofessional. On the other hand, change for the sake of change is just as well fool hearted, but effective change is good. Change to meet the challenges that lie ahead and prepare all for both conventional and unconventional problems and threats will take strength of character and leadership. This leadership needs to come from frontline personnel, mid-level supervisors and administrators, and community and local government leaders.

The main component in the development of good decision makers falls on the individual and individual efforts. However, it is true that the catalyst for this development comes from the top, in leadership. In order to achieve the results that are sought after, in order to be true professionals and prepare for future challenges, leaders must LEAD. It is the leader's role to create and nurture the appropriate environment that emboldens decision makers. Leadership development can be understood as a two way commitment; while it falls on the individual to desire to become a more effective professional, it is the responsibility of the organization's leaders to set the conditions to encourage it. As said by W. Edwards Deming, "The aim of leadership is not merely to find and record failures in men, but to remove the cause of failure."

Vandergriff describes leadership as: "a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective, and directs his or her organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent." (Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, 2006).<sup>14</sup> This is the definition that law enforcement and security professions should subscribe to; however, all too often both frontline personnel and managers deny that these kinds of training can be done. Leaders of the profession often complain that: "*this type of training and developing initiative driven personnel will cause more problems for departments and agencies in dealing with liability issues and complaints because control is lost.*" The opposite is, of course, true—as has been proven throughout this article. Those professionals in leadership roles need to understand that this is not a free reign type of leadership. As a matter of fact, if done appropriately, administering these training programs will actually take more effort and time on the part of the leader, because they will be involved. Training

programs will be enhanced and the learning that takes place unifies agencies and all the individuals in it. How?—through the system described above which develops “mutual trust” throughout the organization because the focus is on results. The “how to” is left to the individuals and the instructors, but a culture must exist to encourage what the Army calls outcome based training (Vandergriff Manning the Legions of the United States and Finding tomorrow’s Centurians). Mutual trust (unity) allows individuals to think and innovate when solving problems because they know it’s what is expected. In this kind of culture, each member of the group will be held accountable for their actions, good and bad. Furthermore, those leaders will be standing there with them, in the aftermath of a good or bad decision.

If frontline personnel are expected to go out and deal with dangerous circumstances and resolve them, they must be ensured that the leadership will be doing all they can do to develop, nurture and stand behind decisions that are made. It is also important that the leaders be willing to except responsibility when things go wrong. The world of law enforcement and security is complex and chaotic, yet the vast majority of situations are handled without drastic or tragic results. This is done with very little training in decision making. For example, less than one percent of the time a law enforcement officer uses force, yet leadership still fails to back an officer’s decision. Another article could be written on politics, lack of knowledge in conflict, an unwillingness to take a stand on behalf of the decision maker, unwillingness to correct an obvious problem they observe, etc. etc. etc. Concerning the task at hand, the point is that if one takes on a leadership role, one must be prepared to LEAD. Leaders must possess the strength of character to do what needs to be done in creating the appropriate training and learning environments. From personal experience in the field and in training, it can be concluded that the most common response regarding failure to make a decision is as follows: *“We will not get backed by our bosses.”* These words are often uttered from those law enforcement and security professionals who deeply care about what they do and are committed to doing well, yet they feel, for whatever reason, that they will not be backed on their decisions. A leader’s role is to inspire others to complete the mission, whatever the mission is. A leader’s role is to develop unity and focus. A leader’s role is to hold themselves and others accountable for actions taken, rewarding good decisions and learning from and, if warranted, disciplining for bad decisions. A leader’s role is to reduce friction in decision making of frontline personnel. These roles must be carried out fairly, with integrity leading the way, or law enforcement and security professionals will not be prepared for the problems and threats that they will face. Try

it—it comes with a guarantee that the professions will relish in the benefits and the results.

*I would like to thank Don Vandergriff for all his insight and assistance into my writing this article. The numerous emails and phone calls interrupting his busy schedule would be trying for most, yet Don always took the time to answer questions and give advice. Don, you're a true innovator and mentor. Many thanks.*

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>3</sup> Vandergriff, Donald, personal email communication, July 10<sup>th</sup> 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Col Boyd, John, *Patterns of Conflict*.

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<sup>10</sup> Vandergriff, Donald (RET MAJ U.S. Army) *How to Create Adaptive Leaders, How to teach-facilitate-mentor, Handbook For Instruction of Adaptive Leaders* (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Col Boyd, John, *Patterns of Conflict*.

<sup>14</sup> Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War*, 2006.

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