



Officer Created Jeopardy: Reduce it with a Strategic and Tactical Mind

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Fighting is not only a battle of courage, but also of wits. Hence, creating false formations and illusions enables one to be camouflaged. This confuses the enemy.” ~100 Strategies of war

A few months back I read a great article titled “Officer Created Jeopardy” over on [Spartan Cops](#), a web-site dedicated to helping cops. The article spurred a lot of thinking about the messages I try to convey to those I have the privilege of sharing awareness, decision making, survival and utility of force information with, in an effort to make us all better at what we do.

Spartan Cops defined *Officer Created Jeopardy* as a situation where an officer deviates from established tactics or policies and his actions unnecessarily place him (and/or others) at greater risk of harm. For example, an officer stepping in front of a fleeing vehicle and shooting puts him in danger of being run over.

I thought the definition especially apt in the policy and procedure driven world of law enforcement today, but as I thought deeper about it, I realized that the problem lies in the definition. I understand exactly what the writers were trying to say: follow the procedure, do as you are trained to do and you will come out on top--you will win. This is what most of us think when it comes to training; if we follow the designed policy or procedure, or use a checklist, all will turn out right. In reality, however, this is not the case.

Policies and procedures and checklist driven law enforcement organizations are teaching cops *what* to think, instead of *how* to think, and this is dangerous. Dangerous in the sense that the types of circumstances cops handle are dynamic, rapidly changing, complex situations that require walking, talking, thinking cops. Policies take the thinking out of the equation. For years, those of us who train other officers thought policies and procedures were the answer. In reality, as soon as circumstances change, to something an officer on the street has never seen before, many do not react. They cannot think of a new plan. They fail to adapt to the changes they see, and either freeze, while trying to figure out what’s going on, or carry on unaware. They wind up emotionally charged with yesterday’s plan, policy or procedure that does not work today.

Officer Created Jeopardy is a failure to adapt to changing conditions. It instills a false sense of urgency, complacency, emotions, habit, or personal attributes that stifle insight and innovation. It

is also the lack of knowledge and/or the inability to apply knowledge in a strategic and tactical way to the changing conditions. Considering the factors of time and risk, *Officer Created Jeopardy* can also be created, within an organization, where distrust and lack of support are the prevailing feelings for action taken outside of procedural guidelines. (*We could write another whole article on this topic of organization trust as it relates to frontline performance! Watch for more on this topic another time.*)

Understanding strategy and tactics is an art and science that we all must strive to grasp. Applying tactics based solely on policy and procedure, or yesterday's battle in today's situation is a critical decision,-- one that should be based on the conditions officer(s) are dealing with, and not a canned response. A decision that affects the outcomes in a given set of circumstances requires initiative and innovation on the part of officer(s), and the ability and flexibility to make decisions has a direct effect on officer created jeopardy.

The (often) missing link of strategy and tactics is operational art--or, applying what we know to a given set of circumstances. It's the link between the end (strategy) and our means (tactics) to get there. Operational art helps us apply our knowledge to the situation at hand, considers the moral, mental and physical dimensions of conflict, as well as the methods and tactics we use in implementing our strategy to protect and serve.

In our day-to-day activities, most protection professionals wear uniforms making us readily identifiable to the citizens we protect and the criminals we seek to stop. They know who we are and that our overall motive is to protect and serve. Although we make it a point to know our communities and those who live and work there, we do not know everyone, nor their motives. Most go about their daily lives to live the dream and provide for their families. Others seek to do harm to citizens and those of us who protect and serve. This fact alone puts us at a great disadvantage and creates possible jeopardy through uncertainty. Uncertainty is the key ingredient that heightens jeopardy. ***Officer created jeopardy comes from the deadly combination of uncertainty about a situation and the uncertainty of how to handle it.***

The uncertainty unfolding in a given situation is very difficult to control; we just plain cannot know everything that's going on at any instant. And as the situation changes (often and quickly), we can only control and not anywhere near completely-- the tactics and methods we will use to resolve a situation. I say not completely because when the situation changes we just may have to change tactics. Failure to change when the situation requires it can be deadly. A false sense of urgency and an impulsive response -- for example, charging into the unknown towards the sound of guns -- is the kind of emotional response that can get you and others hurt or killed. We cannot eliminate all risk, but we can factor and calculate risk into the equation based on available time. This is called *adaptation*, a necessary tactical instrument to have in our tool box that is always with us. It is the definition of our capacity to think, decide and respond on our feet.

Developing our ability to think and decide under pressure is the key to reducing *officer created jeopardy* yet it is often overlooked in training and development. Often times, law enforcement and security personnel are required to make decisions with very little information available, and even less time. This time deficit can occur for a number of reasons, but is most likely a result of the following: rapidly changing circumstances; or, an individual officer, who is locked into a complacent mindset and therefore misses critical information. In both cases, decision making is difficult due to a 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 the end, creating and nurturing an environment where there is less *officer created jeopardy* is the key to **reducing deaths and injuries**. To be effective on the street, one must be able to process information under pressure quickly and deliberately. Through continual development with varied scenarios and constant feedback from mentors, peers and instructors, law enforcement and security 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.

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” the definitive book on developing adaptability, written [by Don Vandergriff](#), describes key characteristics of adaptive individuals; the characteristics that are critical to possess if the professionals of law enforcement and security are to be successful. It is also 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 *fingerspitzenfuhl* 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 an 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, with the intent of reducing *officer created jeopardy*.

“The Easterner’s approach to combat does little more than obey common sense at the squad level. Yet, it is quite different from that in the West. The American, British, or French commander will “march to the sound of the guns” and then look for the wherewithal with which to succeed. He may curiously scan the battlefield from afar but then pins his unit’s chances of victory almost entirely on his own tactical-decision making and leadership ability.” ~John Poole, the Phantom Soldier

Stay Oriented!

Fred