



Is “Officer Friendly” a Factor to Consider in Engagements with Our Adversary?

By Fred Leland

*“Citizens of the community, administrators, and heads of law enforcement agencies desire to interact with friendly officers. While a **friendly image** does much to promote a positive image for the officer and the department, **overly friendly behavior at an inappropriate time** may cause some offenders to view this as a sign of vulnerability.” ~Violent Encounters, A Study of Felonious Assaults on Our nations Law Enforcement Officers, Federal Bureau of Investigation*

“What are your thoughts about the friendly officer and the trait of friendliness being a characteristic prevalent in Cops “killed in the line of duty?” This question was posed by a veteran officer I know and respect after class last week in which the topic was [“Officer Created Jeopardy.”](#) We had discussed in class building trust within the community and how a friendly demeanor on the part of us cops would help build trust and hence the ability to get more information and cooperation allowing us in law enforcement to be more effective on the street resolving the problems we face. His point was if you’re too friendly, some violently motivated people will perceive this as weakness and will be motivated to attack.

The friendliness factor is well known attribute in the law enforcement community and has been studied since 1992 by the FBI in three major studies “Killed in the line of Duty (1992)”, ‘In the Line of Fire (1997)” and “Violent Encounters (2006) which list behavioral descriptors of officers killed and assaulted.

- Friendly
- Well liked by community and department
- Tends to use less force than other officers felt they would use in similar circumstances
- Hard working
- Tends to perceive self as more public relations than law enforcement
- Service oriented
- Used force only as last resort (*peers claimed they would use force at earlier point in similar circumstances*)

- Doesn't follow rules, especially in regard to (arrests, confrontations with prisoners, traffic stops and waiting for back-up)
- Feels he/she can "read" others/situations and will drop guard as result
- Tends to look for the good in others
- Laid back and easy going

Friendliness alone does not lead to an assault. Instead it is the deadly combination of all or some of these traits including a *naïve form of friendliness*. Law Enforcement officers and trainers throughout the country have studied, written and spoke about [Behavioral Descriptors](#) of Officers Killed and Assaulted, in an effort to better prepare cops for the dangers they face out there on the frontline.

The focus in studying these attributes or descriptors is to understand factors surrounding assaults and deaths of officers but also in how we can leverage them as a tactic. The focus of this post is friendliness as a tactic as you interact with a potential adversary so you can maneuver and get inside the mind and slow down your adversary's decision making cycle.

Friendliness can be a powerful tactic when used appropriately in combination with [superior situational awareness](#). Friendliness, the ability to show respect, empathy and concern for another, even as a false front has a powerful effect and can wear down an adversary, even dangerous individuals.

In the ["Deadly Mix"](#) (*officer, subject and circumstances*) as they interact and converge, influences the outcome of the encounter. Will we solely use attrition, force on force or can we craft a plan of maneuver using friendliness as a tactic to win without fighting? There is at times a disconnection in the value of interplay as we accord with and adversary. Friendliness is seen as a weakness to us. We have been told to take control of situations and the automatic response in doing so, in many cases are to use anger, loud voices and force to accomplish our goal. Many also naively use friendliness and handle a potentially violent person in a complacent and dangerous way. There is a balance in using friendliness as a tactic to exploit voluntary compliance or cooperation.

The key is not to be naive and to realize that friendliness alone is not always enough to stop a violent attack. Risk can at times be heightened as we try to buy time with a friendly demeanor and seek the opportune moment to gain control. To work through risk use interaction and your ability to [read the scene](#) and individual by maintaining your awareness. This will keep you alert to the changes in the subject's demeanor and his/her intent.

[Superior situational awareness](#), interaction, (*the goal of which is to "isolate" our adversary to the point he feels incapable of reaching his own goals and complying with our will*) and an officer's attitude and demeanor are factors influencing any encounter. Remember, our adversary is working his own plan on us in an attempt to get his way.

In this article our focus is “friendliness” as it relates to [interaction](#) with our adversary or “enemy.” In his book *The 33 Strategies of War* Robert Greene states, “*Understand the word enemy—from the Latin word inimicus, “not a friend” has been demonized and politicized. Your first task as a strategist is to widen your concept of the enemy, to include in that group those who are working against you, thwarting you, even in subtle ways.*”

Police, and security situations where [conflict and violence](#) often linger, the center of gravity is the adversary's motives, intent and mindset. Motives, intent and mindset cannot be predicted with certainty; therefore we must develop knowledge of conflict and violence in its three dimensions, the [moral, mental and physical](#) and how to translate this knowledge as it is applied in a given set of circumstances. This is done *at times* through up close and personal interaction. Behind a friendly facade of deception much can be learned and leverage to our advantage.

Our goal in using *friendliness* as a tactic is to manipulate our adversary into a less costly non-violent encounter by build a rapport, if even for only a moment, so we seize the initiative and gain voluntary compliance without becoming a naïve victim. There is a constant balance between attrition and maneuver, between friendliness and force. Being able to read your adversary and sensing his intentions while keeping him guessing as to yours. This takes hard work, superior situational awareness and a different way of thinking about human attributes, human nature and how we deal with conflict and violence.

“War is not an act of the will aimed at inanimate matter, as it is in the mechanized arts...Rather; it is an act of the will aimed at a living entity that reacts.” ~Carl von Clausewitz

Stay oriented!

Fred