



By Richard Kay

# Reality-based Training for the Security Industry

**R**eality-based training, force-on-force, confrontational simulation, use-of-force simulation training, scenario training, tactical simulations, experiential training... it goes by many names, but the premise of the training remains the same – place a student into a setting that simulates a real-life encounter in order to test his ability to respond to that incident within policy and the law.

There are three stages in use-of-force training:

1. Knowledge (theory – when and why to use force).
2. Skill acquisition (practical – what to do when using force).
3. Simulation (reality-based training – how stages one and two function under operational stress).

Historically, RBT (reality-based training) has been the domain of law enforcement and military, which recognize the need for realistic training to adequately prepare their personnel for the operational environment. Across the entire spectrum of operational roles, RBT is seen as an integral aspect of training.

Not so with the security industry, which to date has largely failed to embrace this essential component, and continues to train officers in 'basic' knowledge and skills only. Training is generally designed to meet minimum, state-mandated standards, with time, cost and lack

of appropriately qualified trainers having a major influence.

Many instructors mistake 'dynamic' drills for RBT, but the former are still stage two. RBT is a separate stage that participants progress to. To be done properly, RBT must be a highly structured, carefully designed situation with predictable outcomes and tightly structured roles and responsibilities for training staff. This type of training, when properly designed, can unearth glaring problems with officers that previous types of training and testing protocols leave undiscovered.

Most of the training that currently occurs takes a backward approach in attempting to achieve its objectives. Training is usually structured so that officers are often told what to do rather than taught how to think. Much of this stems from getting vast numbers of personnel through training programs for the purposes of 'qualification' in order to meet the minimum standard. Officer safety on the street becomes a secondary concern to safety in training and cost/time considerations. Strangely, these two concerns function at direct odds with each other given that many of the behaviours taught in training are actually counterproductive to winning/surviving a violent confrontation. These procedures help to reduce time/cost/injuries in training, but they condition behaviour that may prove dangerous in the real world.

Such is the importance of 'reality preparation' that, in the USA, courts have issued a 'message'

for agencies, stating that training should cover "whatever the officer can reasonably be expected to confront", and therefore include at minimum more frequent training with realistic environments, relevance to assignments, policy reinforcement, force level integration and transitions, judgmental training, and tactical realities such as moving targets, reduced light and use of cover.

As seen through studies of shortcomings, aside from deficiencies with physical skills, problems with officer performance can be attributed to an understanding of their force model. Officers seem to have at least a basic grasp of various combative skills and the circumstances under which each force option might be appropriate, but when it comes to actually making a force option choice under realistic conditions, it seems there is a disconnect between what they should be doing and what they actually do. This division occurs because there is often no clear experiential connection between knowledge and skills.

Issues with divergent instructor philosophies, unprecedented litigation where it seems that the criminals' rights are paramount and officers are required to justify their actions in situations that occurred in fractions of a second, and the current trend of officers getting loaded up with all the 'touchy-feely' stuff, while getting cut back on all the 'smacky-shooty' stuff, all affect training systems and operational outcomes. Liability-conscious administrators chant the mantra of force being an absolute last resort, until many officers are paralysed by uncertainty as to what to

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do next when they cannot 'tongue-fu' their way out of a predicament.

The solution to this confusion lies in RBT programs that include an experiential learning component, backed up with a comprehensive understanding of the psychology of encounters. If the training is both well designed and properly administered, it is possible to provide an officer who is trained to the level that society both demands and deserves. It is a systematic approach that requires considerable forethought, meticulous organization and unflinching dedication.

One of the key challenges for RBT instructors is that, when properly implemented, it does not easily conform to many of the organizational norms currently associated with conventional styles of training. The current paradigm for training calls for relatively brief training sessions with high student/trainer ratios. This might work well for some topics, but not with RBT. In order to be truly effective, a comprehensive RBT program must be done either through block training or through a process of in-service training. If RBT is to be offered during a block training module, it is essential that the agency not try to cram too much information into the scenarios, or try to rush too many people through in a limited amount of time. It is necessary to recalibrate some of the beliefs held by individuals and agencies in order to develop the new training paradigm.

One of the greatest challenges is educating existing instructors, not only in understanding the need for RBT, but in comprehending the additional training required to conduct RBT that is both safe and effective.

Common reasons for reluctance in conducting RBT include:

- Time and money constraints

In the absence of a proper training program, an agency is either going to spend time and money in defending lawsuits, paying the added expense of workers compensation claims, or absorbing lost man-hours as the result of unnecessary injuries. Agencies that have adopted a comprehensive RBT program have experienced a decline in officer involved injuries as well as a reduction in complaints and civil litigations.

- Administrative issues

Hurting people during RBT to the extent that it is cause to terminate the program indicates that the training was being done in a haphazard or frivolous manner. If staff are educated to set the training up properly and allocate the necessary resources to do it right, most of the injuries will vanish right along with the liability stats.

- Instructor experience

Many instructors believe that because they teach use of force (knowledge and skills) they can naturally progress into RBT with no additional training. However, after attending an RBT instructor program, most instructors are surprised to discover how much is involved in running proper training, and are often amazed that they have not hurt anyone doing things the way they had been doing them in their own programs. In RBT school, instructors learn how to run safe and realistic training, with time dedicated to providing the maximum amount of knowledge about RBT. Topics dealing with training ammunition and training device usage, safety rules and standards, and protective equipment issues should be thoroughly covered. Instructors learn how to run safe and effective comprehensive training programs, and to develop effective scenarios that are designed to directly connect their use-of-force model with officer actions, while reducing injuries and liability exposure. It is not product specific; rather, it teaches training concepts through which instructors can make better use of any technologies.

- Liability concerns with equipment

If someone is hurt during RBT, the question will be whether or not training staff had been reasonably trained in the use of the training equipment and methodology. There is no necessity to get that training directly from the equipment manufacturer, as long as the training has come from an organization that can provide adequate training in the safe use of the product. For example, when learning to drive a Ford, training can be provided by any competent driving trainer; it does not have to come from Ford.

To begin to see the positive effects of RBT at the street level, it is important to understand the underlying psychological architecture of human behaviour. The training methods used in a progressive training program must function at both the operative (physical skill) level as well as at the cognitive and pre-cognitive (psychological) level. Instructors must understand the psychology of encounters to be able to dissect and understand the actions of the students so that they can help to effect any necessary changes through remedial training.

RBT should be viewed as an essential progressive component of officer safety training, not an afterthought. Everyone involved in the training process – instructors, officers and agencies – needs to make a cultural shift in their approach to operational safety.

RBT creates learned responses under pressure, so officers can:

- Understand the dynamics of violent confrontation
- Properly evaluate the risks they face
- Plan what to do in the event of a deadly threat
- Master appropriate survival tactics.

Proper, prior preparation for a violent confrontation is the key to winning that encounter. Without it, the aggressor holds the advantage, leaving the officer relying on luck. In the final analysis, use of a strike, restraint, baton or firearm poses similar operational risks, regardless of differing operational roles. Having different standards for use-of-force training for officers using these tools is just not logical. It is time for the security industry to embrace RBT as a mandatory component of ALL use-of-force training, and join the other professions where use of force is an operational reality. ■

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