

Live Action Response Drills Teaching LEO's Tactical Appropriateness

In today's world of rising violence, Law Enforcement Officers (LEO's) are confronted not only with serious physical threats, but also with the legal quagmire that often results in the criminal or civil prosecution of the "good guy" after the fact. As a result of this confusing state of affairs, any defensive tactics (DT) system that promotes itself as teaching real-life street survival must teach more than simple physical tools. A modern study of defensive tactics must at some point grapple with the question of "appropriateness" in training because an understanding of scenario-specific responses can literally spell the difference between life and death on the street and in the courtroom. Every potential scenario presents a different challenge that may require protective skills corresponding to any level of an officer's force continuum. In other words, any scenario could require a response ranging from simple presence and the ability to verbally defuse an attacker, to terminating the danger in a life-or-death, do-or-die moment. Tony Blauer, the originator of the SPEAR System and president of Tactical Confrontation Management Systems (TCMS), has developed a progressive system of drills to instill real-life confidence in his students that address exactly these questions. Known as Live Action Response Drills (LARD), these concepts can literally transform your approach to training.

The foundational structure of the LARD system stems from Tony Blauer's intuitive understanding that from both a philosophical and practical perspective, the most important question that we can ask ourselves in training is, "Why?" "Why would I stand like this? Why would an opponent attack me in this position? Why would I respond like this?" And, perhaps even more cogently, "Why do we practice for things that we never see on a dashboard video?" With an inquiring mind, this type of deep and consistent introspection into our training can reveal much about our relative readiness to "walk our talk" at the moment of truth. The Live Action Response Drill concept is, in reality, nothing more than a beautifully designed series of "why" questions that we can ask ourselves in training. When done properly and consistently, Live Action Response Drills allow you to assess your physical, emotional and psychological toolboxes, deepen your tactical awareness, provide a responsive framework for a variety of assaults and ultimately increase your real world confidence.

One aspect of Blauer Tactical's approach to DT that is alluded to above is the absolute necessity of developing a three dimensional approach to training (emotional, psychological, and physical). Many traditional approaches to training emphasize physical skills above all else. However, it is vital to understand that knowing how to hit is not nearly as important as:

- a. Knowing that you will hit.
- b. Knowing when to hit.

Purely physical forms of training, particularly those that emphasize "sparring" or "consensual" interaction between opponents rarely produce true tactical confidence and skill for a variety of reasons: the most vital flaw being a simple violation of the physiological SAID principle. SAID is an acronym that stands for Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demand. This is one of the foundational laws of human physiology that in essence states that you will get better at doing whatever it is that you practice. As Blauer

states, “If you practice sparring you get better at sparring. If you practice fighting you get better at fighting. Unfortunately, lots of people get really good at the wrong thing.” Live Action Response Drills, because of the use of scenario, verbal assault and response, differing tactical choices and options, and the ability to work against “live” resistance (particularly with appropriate protective gear) all take into account the SAID principle which then allows officers to develop a much broader and complete understanding of real world survival skills.

Regardless of the level of experience, most LEO’s trained in traditional DT systems find their first encounter with a Live Action Response Drill eye opening. The intensity of the experience, although less intense than facing a true threat, causes significant hesitation to respond, a loss of fine motor skills, as well as a decrease in precision, tactical confidence, and appropriate decision making: all of which can be hazardous in the real world both during an actual assault and afterwards. However, this is one of the most beautiful aspects of the drill in that it reinforces another of Blauer’s maxims: “The true warrior always seeks weakness.” In other words, training should always be aimed at exploring and then fixing the holes in our own arsenals. Live Action Response Drills will quickly demonstrate what you can and cannot do, and then direct you on a path to developing viable attributes and abilities for the streets.

Mechanics of the Drill

In order to properly understand the immense value Live Action Response Drills can bring to training it is vital to embrace two of Blauer’s most potent paradigm shifts:

1. The scenario determines everything.
2. The opponent always controls the fight.

The tools, tactics and targets that come into play in any encounter then are all determined by the scenario and opponent(s) that you face. These concepts are the underlying principles that give Live Action Response Drills the ability to build tactical proficiency and confidence.

Many people would argue with these two concepts. They might state that, “The whole point of our training is maximize our ability to be in control of the fight.” Or, “All that we are concerned about is the actual attack – how to defend against it and how to defeat it”. However, any argument for training that does not acknowledge the importance of the scenario, and the fact that in a real fight the opponent controls the time, place, and circumstances of the assault is lacking. As an example, Blauer often asks officers to consider this question. “Is a two hand shove a lethal force attack?” Almost instinctively, most LEO’s respond with a resounding “No!” However, consider the possibility of the shove occurring on the curb of a busy street or highway, at the edge of a bridge, mountain trail or apartment balcony. Could the recipient of a shove in these scenarios potentially receive lethal injuries? Of course. From a purely physical perspective, a shove is just a shove regardless of where it occurs. However, the scenario dictates everything!

Now, imagine the following: In the early morning hours of your shift you answer a call to a disturbance at a well-known local bar. As you reach the darkened area of the front door and move to open it, it is violently shoved into you, with the handle jamming your hand and wrist as the edge of the door catches you in the forehead and face. As you are

momentarily staggered back from the door, it swings open and a large male moves quickly toward you. Almost immediately, you are grabbed by the front of your shirt and shoved against the wall, banging the back of your head in the process. As you read this what are you visualizing as your response? Will you simply give a strong verbal command to stop, try to access some of your traditional DT counters to a grab, reach for your OC or baton, or attempt to draw your firearm? Before you choose an answer, consider one more vital piece of information. The “attacker” in this case is the doorman of the bar who just ejected the “disturbance” two minutes before you arrived. When he did so, the individual threatened him saying he would be back with a weapon in a few minutes to “fix things.” Based on this scenario, which of the responses you visualized were appropriate to the threat?

One of the greatest dangers of typical DT training in today’s world is that there is an almost total lack of focus on the three dimensional aspects of any confrontation. LEO’s who are not given adequate training in the ability to verbally defuse a tense situation are, by default, more likely to resort to physical responses to deal with a potential threat. There is an old saying that says, “If all you’ve got is a hammer, it’s amazing how quickly everything begins to look like a nail.” In other words, if all DT training is geared to create an aggressively physical response to any dispute officers are far less likely to think about talking their way out of an assault. In many cases, this leaves them on very shaky legal, ethical and moral ground. By the same token, DT tactics and classes that do not provide officers with a pragmatic set of tools that develop real life confidence, create an even more dangerous situation by developing LEO’s who have no trustworthy options available to them. This results in an over-dependence on technology to keep officers safe – a potentially lethal tactical mistake in the chaos of a real fight. With regards to this training blunder Blauer often quotes an LEO friend from Great Britain who states, “We train the kit (equipment) – not the warrior.”

If you will, re-view the above scenario. Only this time, mentally change the attacker from a nervous doorman to a large, obviously intoxicated, attacker carrying an exposed blade. How does this change your mindset and visualization of your response to the attack? Let’s complicate it even further. How would you respond if you were the sole officer answering the call? What would you do if your partner were the recipient of the initial assault as you trailed behind? What would your initial movement be if the same assault occurred while you were off duty and accompanied by your spouse? In each case, the scenario could dictate a totally different response. When you begin to view your DT training from this perspective, the need for creative drills that teach appropriateness becomes all the more apparent.

At the basic level of Blauer Tactical Systems Live Action Response Drills, officers are confronted with four potentially appropriate responses to any given assault: all of which help establish a better real world understanding of the practical application of standard Use of Force Policies. The four training options initially are:

1. Presence and Verbal De-escalation
2. Verbal De-escalation leading to Stun and Tactical Disengagement
3. Verbal De-escalation leading to Stun and Control to Cuff Tactics
4. Verbal De-escalation leading to Lethal Force Options

Each of these responses can be applied to any assault that you might imagine. The potential scenarios that can be explored with these drills are endless and you need only

ask fellow officers for actual experiences to continually find new ones with which to challenge yourself and your training partners.

Let's briefly examine these four concepts and how they might apply.

Presence and Verbal De-escalation

One of the TCMS maxims is that "Those who are willing to talk can usually be persuaded to walk." In other words, if a potential attacker has not yet physically assaulted you, there is a good chance that appropriate verbal skills can de-escalate the tension and allow all the involved parties to walk away unscathed. This is an art and science in and of itself and warrants extensive study of predator/prey psychology, choice speech patterns, as well as other verbal tools. For the majority of LEO's, this may be the most overlooked area of training.

Verbal De-escalation leading to Stun and Tactical Disengagement

In the event that you are unable to verbally defuse an assault, in many instances the wisest and safest course of action, from both a physical and legal perspective, is to create enough distance and time to escape the immediate threat and then re-assess the situation. These tactics typically utilize quick, non-telegraphic strikes to disorient and psychologically unbalance an attacker long enough to allow you to create distance, call for backup, set-up containment or choose a different force option. Again, this is not something that many DT programs often train or teach. When we again look at the concept that what you do in training is what you will do in real-life, typically at a lower skill level, the need to practice the actual physical tactics required, as well as how to tactically disengage from an opponent becomes evident. Traditional static, technique-driven approaches to DT do not create the requisite psychological, emotional and physical blueprints to allow officers to safely move through this option and answer the requisite "Why" questions surrounding this level of engagement.

Verbal De-escalation leading to Stun and Control to Cuff Tactics

Obviously, in many instances, it is necessary to not only stun an attacker after verbal attempts have failed, but also to control the attacker until either backup arrives or the subject is cuffed and contained. In this section of the drill, the actual physical tactics that come into play are usually a combination of the non-telegraphic strikes mentioned above with street-savvy close quarters and groundfighting skills. In this version of the drill, officers are confronted with the need to develop sufficient skill to move from an "out of control" moment to "control tactics" – which, in reality, require two different toolboxes. The precise and consistent application of this phase of the drill can create significant improvement in any officer's tactical ability to defend against a motivated resistor, as well as develop the emotional control and relative calm necessary to prevent the use of excessive force once the attacker is under control

Verbal De-escalation leading to Lethal Force Options

Finally, in stage four of the drill, ending the threat is the directive. The emphasis at this stage of the drill is on employing the full close-quarter arsenal to quickly debilitate the attacker. In other words, in this phase of the drill, the attacker is a motivated resistor who has no qualms about seriously injuring or killing an officer. At this stage, another of the

TCMS maxims to consider and take to heart is that “real fights happen in the space of a phone booth.” This visualization can help ensure that skill development of the entire close quarter arsenal including elbows, knees, headbutts, gouges, rakes, pinches and bites is a matter of utmost importance. This is a fight that takes place at extreme close quarters and it is a fight that must be won. Officers that participate and use this phase of the Live Action Response Drill quickly realize that in the chaos of this fight, accessing higher force options and equipment is not nearly as clear-cut as many DT systems teach.

Return, now, to the original confrontation noted above and mentally visualize a situation/scenario in which the identical physical attack could have any one of the four appropriate responses from the Live Action Response Drill. As you begin to apply this principle to every type of common assault, not only will your tactical decision making skills dramatically improve, but your physical tactics will also become far more refined.

Winning all the Battles

Blauer often likes to point out that real world confrontations require a different toolbox than the one that is useful in the DT room or ring. While traditional forms of DT training, drills, sparring and other activities can be valuable in a wide variety of arenas such as conditioning, flexibility, speed, strength and tool development, they rarely instill the moral, legal and ethical platforms that are so necessary to survive in today’s world. Blauer states that, “In any real fight, there are actually three separate battles.”

- A. You vs. You
- B. You vs. Opponent
- C. You vs. Legal System

Each battle requires a different set of skills, mindsets and tactics. Live Action Response Drills are among the most useful tools available to develop your capabilities for each battle. When done with intensity and focus, they will teach you much about you, your ability to control fear and deal with the emotional and psychological stress inherent in dealing with a threat. They provide a safe and extremely effective method for pressure testing your tools and tactics against an opponent: a vital step in developing real world efficacy. And finally, they provide a foundation of appropriate responses to differing threats that will allow you to articulate how and why you acted to protect yourself. With this combination of benefits it is easy to see that for the officer who takes his or her training seriously, incorporation of Live Action Response Drills into training can create a quantum leap in the ability to survive a real assault, both the actual attack and its legal aftermath, in today’s confusing and chaotic world.