



The Science of Training

with [David Blake](#)

Truly test your officers with reality-based training

RBT is an extremely well planned method of putting officers in the most realistic situations with the most realistic equipment while using some basic psychological methods to ensure the training “sticks”

Apr 25, 2014

In [several of my columns](#), I've examined how we can use LEOKA and Force Science findings to help create new and/or improved training (and tactics).

I've advocated the concept of Reality Based Training (RBT) as the best avenue under which to conduct the testing and evaluation of tactics and training as we work toward improvement in our processes, polices, and procedures.

However, I believe RBT can be degraded and lose its value depending on budgets, personnel, time issues and the level of instructor understanding of its concepts. For instance, I've heard some say, “scenario training is scenario training” and such statements grate on me like sand in special places. Reading Ken Murray's “Training at the Speed of Life” will help anyone understand that true RBT is its own animal, and that must be followed religiously in order to really do it correctly.

In RBT, The Emphasis is ‘Reality’

What is the difference is between scenario training and RBT? To answer that, let's dissect some “scenario” trainings — yours, perhaps — we've seen, and consider how they may differ from a similar real life encounter. Grab a sheet of paper and answer some questions:

- 1.) Does it include dispatchers?
- 2.) How do your officers arrive on scene?
- 3.) Does it utilize police vehicles?

- 4.) Do officers wear full duty uniform with all required equipment (training tools as replacements)?
- 5.) Do your role players wear the clothing described in the suspect description?
- 6.) Do officers always cuff and search fully before a scenario ends?
- 7.) Do 9 out of 10 scenarios involve a shooting or use of force?

We're taught to train like we fight and fight like we train — but I bet you have a list of answers in front of you says you're not totally abiding by that standard.

Let's consider a better alternative. Picture an officer going through a scenario in full uniform and full equipment (with training substitutions). The officer is formally dispatched on a training channel by an actual dispatcher who has been provided a script of a domestic violence incident. The dispatcher provides updates of an escalating incident as the student drives to the call.

A continuing escalation requires a (slow) code 3 response (closed course) where the officer must coordinate with responding units. The officer arrives on scene to a screaming "wife" with obvious injuries while the "husband" steps out on the front porch with a knife to his own throat. The officer must then talk the husband into surrendering and safely take him in to custody.

The scenario might end at the natural conclusion of the husband being handcuffed and searched — but you may also include a verbal debrief from the student officer asking what paperwork needs to be completed or which policies applied to the event.

Facilitating a Winning Mindset

Remember those academy scenarios where you were knocking at the knees waiting to go through a short scenario which would determine whether you passed or failed? How about the advanced officer training where you walked into a room only to come under a barrage from multiple gunmen? I will admit that I used to find it fun to learn how to "die" in such a spectacular manner or to fail a scenario because I didn't find that limber guy hidden under a 2' x 2' space under a kitchen sink.

But this is not a method of training which instills positive learning, nor does it help a student want to come back next time (further lowering the learning curve).

I am a firm believer that most any trained officer (yes, even the rookie) can make it through most any realistic scenario — the difference is how you as an instructor facilitate the training.

Unfortunately, there are instructors who will simply say, "You fail — get to the back of the line."

There are even instructors who berate below-standard performance publicly in front of other trainees. RBT instructors should never ever do this and are taught (Ken Murray style) to use a specific method to ensure student officers are successful.

True RBT requires that instructors recognize when students enter into an OODA loop or some other failure to cognitively resolve a problem. The instructors then pause the scenario exactly how it is and help officers solve the problem through a line of open questioning.

The officers almost always solve the problem themselves and the instructor can push the, “play” button to continue the scenario. This method provides the student officer with a “win” — significantly increasing the learning curve through a positive imprinting method. As instructors, it’s our job to facilitate learning, not to show students how wrong they are.

Stress Inoculation: The Bread and Butter of RBT

Every training program should have evidence of its worth and that evidence should be science-based as opposed to shiny object-based. There is an overwhelming amount of science-based evidence to suggest that true RBT is a strong, if not the strongest method of overcoming stress and solidifying task proficiency (within the police training world).

The simple fact that RBT is a tool used in a type of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT / Stress Inoculation Training) should be evidence enough, but the military is even using similar cutting edge concepts to [increase performance](#).

Knowing what we do about human performance under stress and the benefits of stress inoculation through realistic scenario training, I believe there is no better method than formal RBT to train and even to test tactics and [officer proficiency](#).

From demonstrating knowledge of policy related to a rape investigation to demonstrating proficiency with an AED / CPR — and even to those infrequently occurring uses of deadly force — true RBT is the only method that can demonstrate officer performance under stress while within a safe and positive learning environment. In a time when changes in training are crucial due to what we are told about human performance, there truly are no better all-encompassing, proven training / testing program.

The bottom line is that RBT is an extremely well planned method of putting officers in the most realistic situations with the most realistic equipment while using some basic psychological methods to ensure the training “sticks.”

The purpose is for officers to win while experiencing realistic high-stress situations and seeing them through to a natural conclusion. True RBT must be conducted without cutting corners and requires intensive instructor involvement, and if conducted properly, can be the cornerstone of training / testing environments.

About the author

David Blake is a retired California peace officer and certified Ca-POST instructor in DT, firearms, force options simulator and reality-based training. His experience includes SWAT, force option unit, field training, gangs/narcotics and patrol. He is a certified Force Science Analyst and teaches the Ca-POST certified courses entitled Force Encounters Analysis and Human Factors: Threat & Error Management for the California Training Institute. He also facilitates the Ca-POST Force Options Simulator training to tenured officers from multiple jurisdictions. Dave is an expert witness/consultant in human performance and use of force.

[Contact David Blake.](#)

