

When Violence Prevention Fails, Planning Must Enhance Strategy

By Fred Leland



“Planning is great but plans are useless.” These words uttered by General George Patton should speak loudly and clearly to those of us whose job it is to protect and serve. Planning does help us in setting the finer details of a particular mission.

Let’s say for example, planning a specific school emergency response plan or a specific workplace. I use the term specific because each location or environment is unique and the specifics of each plan therefore unique. The planning phase assists in gathering information such as: numbers of teachers and students attending the school, locations of entrances and exits, potential danger areas or kill zones. The plan identifies locations of site specific infrastructure such as, floor plans, room numbers, power, gas, oil, technology and heating and ventilation system controls.

Planning also identifies tactical rally points and perimeter control points. The plan identifies staging areas for responding resources, rescue teams and advanced life support, transportation, media and parents. In the end planning is about creating and organizing explicit information about a specific location in an attempt to control that which we can, should a violent encounter unfold.

But, is planning enough? My answer is no. Planning is important, but it isn’t everything. Planning is the first step after potential threats or risks have been identified. Sadly this is the stage where most stop. Some organizations may take the additional step of actually talking about a worst case scenario. The fact is, planning is only the beginning of preparation for violent encounters. What we should be striving for is **preparation and readiness**. Here is how my good friend Dag von Lubitz describes preparation and readiness:

“Preparedness means, the ability to put your act together. Readiness means forgetting everything about what has been prepared for and getting in with what you have – which most typically means YOUR HEAD!” In other words you must adapt using your wits, because no plan survives contact with chaotic, complex and unpredictable violent encounters.

The plan will have us prepared for better organizing our response in an emergency set of circumstances. Readiness means we understand that once an emergency takes place the plan as we visualized it may not fit the circumstances and we must **adapt** our original ideas, tactics or methods to meet with the overall strategy.

This requires an ability to read the scene -- the environment and climate of the situation -- then adapt accordingly based on our departments or agencies overall intent, which in violent encounters is to first and foremost protect lives!

Strategy is about experimenting and constantly exploring circumstances and looking for opportunities. It's about being able to apply tactics. Operational art to meet your strategy is where readiness comes from. Walking, talking and thinking human beings have their own ideas motives and intent which will most likely at least initially conflict with ours. In other words, our adversary is unpredictable; the victims are unpredictable and hence the circumstances unpredictable, complex and chaotic. Planning is about creating and organizing site specific information. Strategy is about exploring unfolding circumstances and experimenting through the interaction of a violent encounter to seek an advantage. Planning and strategy are separate factors, linked through circumstances. We must be ready and able to adapt our plan to fit our strategy of protecting life. This takes hard and consistent work. Are you prepared to do it? Our adversaries are!

Stay Oriented!

Fred