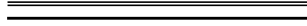
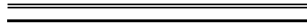


**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Reality Based Training and Its Importance to  
Law Enforcement**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Reality based training (RBT) is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it provides the needed tools for officers to react to potential crisis in a self-survival and sustainable manner. RBT can promote mental acuity, situational awareness, and confidence within the officer so that they may adequately handle various situations as well as save the life of their fellow officers, bystanders, and the suspect. The position of the researcher is that reality based training (RBT) is a type of training that offers officers realistic experiences in training that will provide them the necessary tools to win and survive the potential critical conflicts that they may encounter.

Stress survival strategies and psychological training are not a substitute for experience learned through law enforcement training. Consequently, the skills and mental acuity gained should collaborate with other training to provide a comprehensive approach to the preparation and performance of police officers (Asken, 2007).

Therefore, the two goals of RBT are to provide police officers and law enforcement individuals with a foundation in the mental and psychological skills that can provide an optimum response in times of stress in conjunction with a maximization of an individual's skills.

The conclusion and focus for recommendation for future research involves RBT and its integration with other law enforcement training. For example, these subsequent training strategies can offer a truly comprehensive approach that can allow the police officer to develop a strong foundation of individual skills. These learned and acquired skills can add increased mental awareness, effective psychological skills and confidence, and enhance the officer's ability to always think before acting.

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## INTRODUCTION

Reality based training is an essential component to law enforcement.

Reality based training (RBT) is a type of training that offers officers with realistic experiences in training that will provide them the necessary tools to win and survive the potential critical conflicts that they may encounter. RBT is not necessarily a new concept but rather an innovative approach to modern and current law enforcement in an effort to enhance important concepts and ideas. Docan-Morgan (2004) stated that “training is the process of developing skills in order to more effectively perform a specific job or task” (p.145).

Based upon the following sources, evidence based practices indicated that through the utilization of RBT, law enforcement officers can be effectively equipped with an additional resource to allow them to win a deadly force encounter. RBT will allow individuals to participate in real-world scenarios that will prepare these officers for actual encounters. Thus, this training can ultimately save lives and benefit all law enforcement through the sustainment of the lives of bystander’s and suspects as well. Within law enforcement and the military, the numerous training methods utilized often include video simulation and the holding of a toy gun, live training screens, paint balls and air soft guns, and the actual SWAT team real-life scenarios. Therefore, one hypothesis may be that the real world scenarios are what ultimately teach the officers how to handle and prepare himself or herself for the realistic encounters of a police officer.

As Murray (2006) stated, “the more realistic the environment a student is training in, the more relevant the experience will be when then mind begins searching for similar experiences during its decision making phase of problem solving” (p. 223). According

to Murray (2006), research studies on officers that have been involved in deadly force encounters after being trained through RBT suggested that officers are more likely to win the encounter. Officers are also less likely to report “intrusive thoughts, indecision, and an inability to think their way through the situation, memory distortion, and time and space compression” (Murray, 2006, p. 223). Therefore, with the utilization of “realistic training equipment and props, realistic settings free the student to focus on the training situation rather than trying to imagine things that might not actually be there” (Murray, 2006, p. 223). Thus, it is possible that RBT will allow the individual to focus more clearly and articulate self confidence and assuredness in his or her actions. Subsequently, through the utilization and incorporation of reality based training, officers should be provided survival tools that will allow them to essentially prove successful at many deadly force conflicts that they may encounter.

## **POSITION**

Reality based training (RBT) increases the mental preparedness of the police officer and the ability to survive potentially critical encounters. As Murray (2006) stated, with the utilization of “realistic training equipment and props, realistic settings free the student to focus on the training situation rather than trying to imagine things that might not actually be there” (p. 223). Based upon the preceding source and information presented, through the utilization of real life examples and potential obstacles, the police officer will be capable of learning various alternatives of handling different and potentially life threatening situations. Birzer and Tannehill (2001) also indicated that the methods facilitated by police trainers in police training classes can have an impact on the promotion of such skills as “problem solving, communication, resource identification,

conceptual, and mediation” (p. 237). Thus, through RBT, the police officer might also be provided with skills that allow them to become better prepared at making spontaneous and decisive decisions which could ultimately prove the difference between life and death. Mental acuity might also allow the individual to utilize survival and psychological skills that will provide for maximum execution and adaptation to increase survivability during crisis. For example, reality based training might allow the individual to possibly reduce the physical side effects of critical incident stress reactions and decrease such physical and mental manifestations of anxiety and increased adrenaline. Asken (2007) stated that “stress survival strategies, including controlled breathing, positive self talk, and visualization or mental rehearsal..... may be critical to both improved performance under stress....” (para. 27). Remsberg (2010) also stated that there are several preparedness factors that decide an officer’s destiny. He supported this statement by stating “you have to be mentally and physically prepared each day for whatever may come down the road. Focus on what you can control (your attitude and behavior) rather than what you can’t control (society’s perceptions)” (Remsberg, 2010, para.8).

According to research, the difference in outcome between being mentally prepared and not mentally prepared is that with the mentally unprepared officer, physical factors account for only a small portion while luck accounts for the majority. In mentally prepared officers, mental factors account for the majority of the outcome, while luck and physical factors account for the minority (Asken, 2007). Furthermore, the benefits of RBT can allow the officer to understand the balance of mental and physical

preparedness as well as the extreme importance of a clear and sound mind in making rational decisions while involved in field encounters.

RBT can also increase the self-confidence of the police officer. The experience and the success of RBT will allow the individual to feel more prepared in the event of a critical encounter and thus more proactive. RBT is also imperative for trainees and individuals to keep their skills fresh and thus supplement their proficiency with attendance at recurrent training (Asken, 2007). Consequently, the police officer can feel sufficiently prepared and that he or she provided an optimum response. By feeling comfortable and confident that they displayed their utmost effort, the officer can then understand the weaknesses of his or her preparedness skills and then train additionally within these areas to become more strong and adept. Lastly, Birzer and Tannehill (2001) also acknowledged that for effective learning to occur then the police officer trainee must be actively involved and engaged in the learning process.

Asken (2007) stated that “experience and success after training are perhaps the best factors in the development of confidence” (para.21). The researcher also stated, “the goal is to enhance the confidence of police officers in handling the many different types of calls they face: confidence going into the call, during the call, and after the call is over” (Asken, 2007, para. 21). RBT increases effectiveness through the incorporation and use of simunitions and realistic weapons. Through the utilization of realistic weapons and simunitions, the consequences of making a mistake are real and the individuals is forced to think before they acting (Murray, 2005). Furthermore, the utilization of simunitions will teach the officer how to properly handle these tools and

become more knowledgeable of the various simunitions available and where and when to incorporate these tools within each and every encounter.

Murray (2005) stated that by using realistic props and training versions of equipment and simunitions, the police officer is now aware that the consequences of losing a fight are real. He also emphasized that prior to the use of these types of training tools, there was no consequence to losing the fight; officers would burst into a scenario knowing that there was no pain or compliance on the other side. Consequently, by understanding that there is potentially a winner and loser in most critical encounters and there are repercussions for every action, the officer now realizes the necessity of being mentally and psychologically prepared for the outcome.

### **COUNTER POSITION**

On the contrary, within RBT there is often the training fallacy of “no pain, no gain.” For example, within many training programs, there is often self-defense training, notably boxing programs to instruct officers how to defend his or herself in the event of a potentially life threatening encounter. Professional boxers are accustomed to this type of physical activity and are officiated by medical personnel and referees in the event of any physically threatening behavior. However, when officers are only given 16 hours of boxing training and then are instructed to use “open hands” on suspects; this 16 hours of boxing training is not going to make one a professional boxer (Murray, 2005). Therefore, by placing officers in a life threatening situation with minimal self-defense preparation and setting expectations for him or her to be capable of physically defending him or herself with the confidence and delivery of a professional fighter is not a reality based conception.



Although boxing programs and other self defense programs can prove harmful to the individual, it is also necessary to realistically prepare the individual for a critical encounter. As Murray (2006) stated, through the use of RBT, individuals learn situational awareness and proper judgment and how to accept and channel stress. Physical defense training can allow the officer to gain the mental confidence to accept the unknown of the next call and also channel the stress in order to become more proactive in the event of a crisis with a suspect. Although physical training alone is not a precursor to the success of a police officer, it can allow the officer to use this in collaboration with sound judgment and mental clarity to provision success within a critical encounter. As Murray (2006) stated, in the building of an effective RBT program, the training must be “three dimensional” (p. 210). This training must include the emphasis of the “law enforcement use-of-force model and the idea that if an officer chooses to say engaged with the suspect then there are only three culminating categories: “Talk, Fight, or Shoot” (Murray, 2006, p. 210).

A second counter claim to RBT is the misuse of simunitions and real life weaponry. Within RBT, students accept the idea that real world scenarios will be presented and that this is applicable to their professional as a police officer. However, as Murray (2005) acknowledged, “over the years much harm, both physical and psychological, has unintentionally been done” (para. 5). Statistically, as of 2005, over the previous “six or seven years, two to three officers on average have been killed or seriously injured each year during simulation training exercises in North America” (Murray, 2005, para. 6).

Consequently, opposition believes that the use of weaponry and simunitions are not necessary. However, according to research presented, the utilization of these pieces of equipment is necessary to make the training realistic and to familiarize the individual and Murray (2005) confirmed that with the use of a “simple yet stringent safety protocol, real life weaponry and simunitions can prove beneficial” (para.6). Contrary to this counter claim, as the preceding sources support, without the use of simunitions and real life weaponry, the police officer or law enforcement trainer might not develop a mental and physical awareness of a potential crisis. Therefore, as Murray (2005) confirmed, there must be some degree of accessible simunitions and real life props and weaponry to force the individual to think realistically and logically before acting. Simunitions allow the individual to experience the reality of the encounter and also force the police officer to learn to utilize sound judgment and develop confidence in decisions made, which can ultimately save his or her life.

Through an additional safety verification and inspection of the safety protocol of weaponry and simunitions, the individual should then be required to carry the items within all training sessions. For example, as Murray (2006) stated, training versions of certain equipment should be carried at all times during RBT scenarios. These pieces of equipment include: “firearm, chemical agent, impact weapon, handcuffs, TASER, radio, and miscellaneous items” (Murray, 2006, p. 219). The various mentioned items must be carried to allow the individual to become familiar with the use and accessibility of the items and should “always be issued no matter what level of force is likely to be used during the scenario” (Murray, 2006, p. 219). Preparedness of the officer for any encounter should always be a pre-requisite before entering the field as this will allow the

officer to become mentally prepared as well as physically capable of handling a critical encounter.

The safety of the police officer during RBT is a necessary component and if not present, then the collaborating benefits of mental acuity, psychological awareness, and confidence need to be re-examined. Smith and Carter (2010) stated that “there are many environmental factors which can influence the way in which an officer or other law enforcement practitioner responds to ASB, but training for all eventualities in the field is not realistically possible” (p. 550). Thus, the aspect of virtual training technology might prove more beneficial, and Smith and Carter (2010) emphasized that virtual training can provide a safe environment away from the instability and dangers of the real world. They stated, “Virtual reality technology, through the use of virtual environment simulations, can provide a safe and controlled environment to assist police officer training in simulated urban environments” (Smith & Carter, 2010, p. 550).

A final advantage is that virtual training can allow the officers to gain needed skills in analyzing problems and also exploring new concepts. Virtual world training might also allow the officer to avoid the physical distractions of RBT while learning new strategies and skills and also allow the officer to complete the training with the convenience of 24/7 accessibility which provides greater flexibility. In addition, Kanable (2012) indicated that virtual training provides police departments with the option of facilitating officers with training while no longer having to incur the costs of travel expenses. Furthermore, the departments do not have to worry about losing officers for a week at a time and subsequently provides a vehicle to receive “high-quality training for a fraction of the cost” (Kanable, 2012, p.12). Lastly, the multimedia format of virtual

training as well as the ability to utilize start and stop functions of the virtual training exercises might allow the officer to develop comprehension on how he or she might handle the following exercises and replay certain exercises in order to more fully understand certain material.

On the contrary, it is feasible that virtual training does not solely provide the tools needed in real world scenarios. For example, as a primary training method, virtual training does not provide all of the resources needed to prove advantageous in entire realms of criminal justice. Research confirmed that proposition as Smith and Carter (2010) stated that “Virtual environments should be used as a complementary learning environment to hands-on methods” (p. 551). Therefore, when virtual training is collaboratively used as a training resource or as a supplemental RBT method, then it is possible that the virtual environment can provide positive results for the trainee without the possibility of the expense of the human life. However, when virtual training is used entirely by itself for a training program, then the trainee is being neglected of the opportunity to experience first-hand encounters and obstacles that will occur in the daily life of a police officer. Furthermore, Kanable (2012) also indicated that virtual or online training “does not take the place of hands-on experience and mentorship” (p. 15).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Reality based training (RBT) is a necessity to prepare police officers to prepare themselves mentally, psychologically, and physically to think before they act. RBT will allow individuals to develop their mental acuity to increase their chance of survivability in a critical encounter as well allow them to focus on the important crisis at hand. The training parameters will also help increase the confidence of the individuals by

increasing their fulfillment of the experience and success achieved during their reality based training segments. Lastly, RBT will allow the individual to attain increased knowledge and situational awareness through the implementation and use of simunitions and real life weaponry tools. Ultimately, this training will familiarize the individual with the various tools and their accessibility and potentially increase their response time and ability to be proactive. RBT is crucial in providing tools to allow the police officer to win and survive a possibly critical encounter and develop new coping mechanisms and strategies that will not place him or her at risk as well as fellow officers.

The counter claims referencing the lethal and deadly self-defense training tactics (boxing) of reality based training and the utilization of simunitions and real life weaponry are not applicable. The key component is properly monitored self-defense training with extended training times and perhaps the modification from boxing to possibly martial arts training or such. It is also imperative to adjust the noted mindset of “No Pain, No Gain” to an attitude that is more conducive to realistic and yet constructive training tactics. Foremost, it is important to allow individuals to utilize and handle real life weaponry and law enforcement tools but with a system of checks and balances to ensure accountability and safety. It should also be verified that a safety disclaimer for each individual participating in RBT be implemented as well as an added emphasis on safety requirements allowing each officer to understand both the positive and potentially negative effects.

Lastly, the counter claim of the benefits of virtual training technology versus reality based training should simply be a supplement to real world training to alleviate

the distractions and conflicts presentable in real world scenarios. Although virtual training can prove beneficial by widening the scope of opportunities to examine and investigate (Smith & Carter, 2010), virtual training should be used to complement formal methods such as reality based training. As Remsberg (2010) noted, "Training is what you need to learn from someone else. Practice is a gift you give yourself. For success, both need to be constant" (para.11). In regards to law enforcement officials, this implementation of practice and training can refer to the use of firearms, tactical batons, pepper spray, and the TASER. Consequently, in order for an individual to become competent and knowledgeable of the tools that they are utilizing, it is imperative to actually use these tools and develop proficiency. Otherwise, it is possible that an officer might not be capable of sustaining his or her life and protecting his or her fellow officer simply based on one's own physical capabilities through self-defense or mental acuity.

Remsberg (2010) stated, "For successful cops, there is no acceptable alternative option: You must master the weaponry for every level of force you may be called to use" (para.15). Therefore, reality based training and the utilization of self-defense training and use of simunition and real life weaponry is a necessity in order to teach law enforcement as well as instruct individuals to think before they act as one wrong move can effect their or someone's else's entire life. Through the elimination of self-defense training or the absence of simunitions and real life weaponry, law enforcement officers might not master their skills and become professionals at deflecting critical encounters.

RBT is important to the law enforcement community as it allows police officers to increase the confidence of their own skills as well as the dependence on that of their fellow officers. RBT also increases the mental and psychological preparedness of the

police officer so that he or she is more adapt at handling various situation within a split second. The ability to make rational decisions and utilize the proper tools while sustaining one's life can be the ultimate test of survivability. RBT emphasizes the importance that one second can truly make within a critical field encounter.

Conclusively, through the exposure to various real life scenarios and situations, the police officer is capable of learning how to make better decisions. Remsberg (2010) quoted, "Training and practice are an officer's life blood. They're an investment in your future. You gain confidence from competence and competence from hard work that never ends" (p. 14).

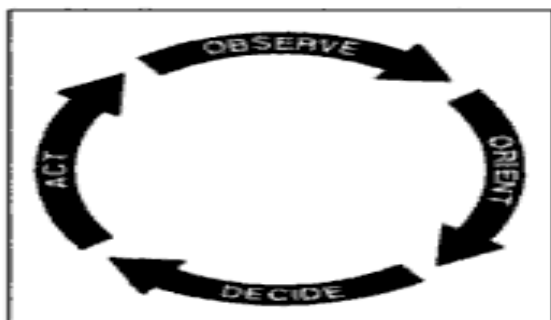
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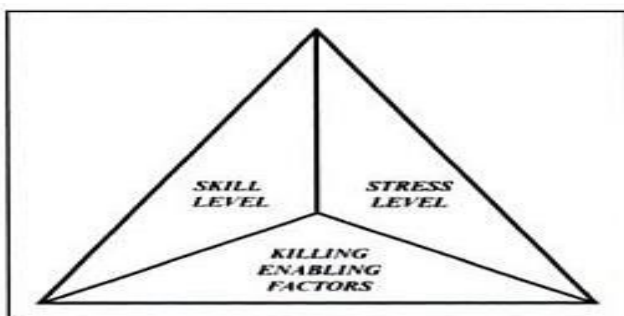
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## APPENDIX



**Figure 2-9**

**Figure 1.** Progressive Cycle of Boyd's Loop (Murray, 2006, p. 54).



**Figure 2-1**

**Figure 2.** Model that incorporates three major aspects effecting officer responses and choice options during a conflict (Murray, 2006, p.23).