

Verbal Tactics Training

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Abstract: The Verbal Tactics Training program was developed to teach both new Missouri Department of Conservation agent trainees and veteran agents how to use verbal skills as a force option to control or defuse dangerous situations. This program is a key aspect of our sequential training for officer survival. The training is conducted by means of lecture, group discussion, role playing, and simulated field checks. Verbal Tactics training strengthens officer awareness during field confrontations.

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The Verbal Tactics Training program was developed in 1989 to be utilized during our 1989 Conservation Agents Trainee Academy and for in-service training of veteran agents. The subject of verbal tactics deals with the conservation agent's use of words to diffuse or gain control of a potentially dangerous encounter.

To begin in Verbal Tactics Training, we first must realize the importance of verbal skills in modern law enforcement. Today's legal system in the United States protects the rights of all people. Unfortunately, our society has found out that one way to wealth and a fruitful life is to "sue" for it. Many times these lawsuits are directed towards law enforcement officers and their agencies. In 1986 alone, >26,000 lawsuits were brought against police officers in this country. The presence of potential lawsuits have in many instances made police officers or conservation agents hesitant to use their baton or firearm. They instead have reverted to their verbal abilities.

The purpose of this program is not to contradict or demote the use of impact instruments or deadly force. These methods of control are needed and must be utilized when the situation mandates or warrants. Our judicial system has set up guidelines which law enforcement officers must follow when using force to make an arrest; the Force Continuum. The Force Continuum has 5 basic steps for the escalation of force. They are:

1. Presence—must identify yourself
2. Verbal Direction
 - A. Advice
 - B. Warning

3. Persuasion (Control)
 - A. Passive
 - B. Active—Open/Empty Hand Techniques
4. Impact Instruments—Batons, Slappers, etc.
5. Deadly Force

As noted in the Force Continuum, verbal direction is step 2. An officer's 2 best weapons are his "brain and mouth." Unfortunately, many agencies spend a great deal of time and money on self-defense and firearm type training, but neglect verbal communication training. Our program, however, is directed at using verbal skills as a force option to defuse dangerous situations.

Our training program for Missouri conservation agent trainees runs 5.5 months. A large portion of this training deals with officer survival. Our training for officer survival follows the sequential order of the Force Continuum. This allows for better comprehension by agent trainees on the use of force and how to avert or control dangerous situations. Verbal Tactics is a key element for officer survival.

The Verbal Tactics Training is a 4-hour block of instruction. The methods of instruction include a 2-hour lecture with group discussion and 2 hours of practical exercise which include role playing and field check situations.

To enhance the learning of verbal communication skills, we use a 5-step program. This 5-step program was developed by G. J. Thompson in his book, *Verbal Judo* (1983). I have adopted Dr. Thompson's Verbal Judo course as the basis for our conservation agents Verbal Tactic Training. Thompson presented his Verbal Judo course to our entire Protection Division during our fall conference in 1987. Thompson's Verbal Judo Course is for the police officer on the street. I have developed our Verbal Tactics Training for the conservation agent who is in the outdoors.

The acronym PAVPO (Perspective, Audience, Voice, Purpose, and Organization) symbolizes our 5 steps to learning the verbal communication process. Each step or element is discussed and placed in sequential order. Throughout the training, we use the terms rhetoric and police rhetoric. Rhetoric is defined as "the art of using words effectively." Police rhetoric is the art of communicating with the public as a law enforcement officer. The entire course evolves around the need for the agent to become an effective communicator.

I begin the training with the events of 1 confrontation, which occurred during the fall firearms deer season of 1984 between Staff Specialist Larry Yowell and myself and 2 survivalists on the Happy Holler Wildlife Area in Andrew County, Missouri. This particular confrontation ended with felony arrests and a 2-year prison sentence for 1 of the survivalists. It was indeed a life threatening confrontation and invokes interest by the trainees. We then begin with the 5 elements of PAVPO.

Perspective

Perspective is the first element in PAVPO. Under this element the conservation agent becomes an observer. This aspect is stressed because of the nature of our work.

In most instances the agent will be alone in a secluded area of his/her district. When given the opportunity, the agent should observe the individual or group he is going to contact. The observation period may disclose aspects of illegal activity or danger.

Of the 5 elements to be utilized in this training, perspective is the most difficult to analyze. The agent must assume a position of disinterest. He must be unbiased and flexible to all new circumstances. To be unbiased means the agent must disregard assumptions he has developed. A biased law enforcement officer will judge without cause, or stereotype individuals by race, sex, or surroundings. We all have biased ideas or thoughts; however, an agent cannot take these thoughts with him on patrol.

At a crime scene, the agent must determine only the facts in a case. In order to be effective, whether at a crime scene, during questioning, field checks, or other criminal confrontations, the element of chaos must be removed. This is accomplished by using a systematic approach called "heuristics." Heuristics is a method of learning by self-teaching. This technique involves the "Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How" questions. These questions diminish an agent's assumptions due to biased thoughts, and control chaos at the scene. Keeping these questions in mind, he must also remember that his safety comes first before questioning can begin. The agent must take charge. Many times witnesses see the same event differently and want to share their opinions of what has occurred. The agent must address only the facts, because opinions can be misleading. An agent also must not use assumptions in communication. To assume certain elements about individuals or their beliefs can be potentially dangerous for an agent who holes them as "self-evident." After the facts are gathered, the agent must use some means to find an end to the problem.

Audience

The second element of PAVPO is audience. An agent must be able to read or analyze an audience. Without this ability, an agent's safety would be in jeopardy. The first truth that an agent cannot forget is that his arrival and presence changes the scheme of the event.

People react differently to the presence of a law enforcement officer. Their reactions may be due to past experiences unknown to the officer. People are naturally territorial and will defend their position and concepts. Territoriality could be shown in the defense of a home, or the basic concept of "the man of the house." A husband during a domestic disturbance will feel mad, or embarrassed that he could not "control" his wife. The presence of an officer heightens his anger and can result in a very dangerous encounter.

Another type of territoriality deals with the human body and space which people desire. During an arrest, a person's own body territory is attacked. Some people go willingly while others may fight and even die trying to resist. The concept of personal space differs from territoriality in that personal space is an invisible distance. Some people are content being close to one another, while other people want to be left alone. This characteristic differs with sex, age, race, culture, status, and personality. These factors, however, must be considered when you take control of a subject.

The agent must determine what rhetoric will be effective on a particular audience. Rhetorical situations call for a fitting response from the audience. Generally we can determine this response by looking at the audience and categorizing it into six possible types. Types of audiences include:

1. Single Person, well defined and known, (example, local fisherman repeatedly checked).
2. Single person, unknown.
3. Single group, well defined and known, (example, local sports club or organization).
4. Single group, unknown.
5. Multiple groups, well defined and known.
6. Multiple groups, unknown.

When an agent communicates with any of the above types he must not assume that known and friendly people will side with him. The agent can not assume that known individuals do not pose a threat, and should never relax too much.

An agent's appearance and body gestures can unknowingly heighten a conflict. The agent with mirrored sunglasses or who adjusts his gun as he approaches a subject is sending negative signals. He, however, may perceive himself as understanding and a sensitive person.

C. R. Rogers, a psychotherapist, has developed a model for police officers to understand audiences. The Rogerian Model identifies 3 obstacles in communication through police rhetoric. They are:

1. Threats hinder communication. If an individual feels threatened by an officer's verbal directions he will stop listening to reduce anxiety.
2. Strong statements of an officer's opinions will cause the audience to respond accordingly. People will defend their opinions in this instance instead of discussing them objectively.
3. Biased statements increase the feeling of threat.

The law enforcement officer can overcome these 3 obstacles by following a 4-step process:

1. Understand the audience's point of view. To do this you must be unbiased and show disinterest. Most subjects are accustomed to an officer making the verbal statements. If on the other hand you begin with an unbiased restatement of the subject's point, you will gain his attention.
2. State valid points of the subject's position. This will strengthen his trust in you and reduce the sense of threat. Most subjects are not familiar with the laws. If you show the individual that some of his ideas are correct, this will make showing him his weaknesses easier.
3. State your position. Let the subject know why you are there. If you have completed Steps 1 and 2, then the subject will be more understanding and receptive

to hear your position. At this time you should try to recreate the events. Once again, restate and compare your beliefs with those of the subject's. Place yourself in his shoes. Share your past experiences with him which were similar to the situation at hand. Appear to be understanding and show sensitivity to decrease the chance of violence.

4. State benefits for the subject if he accepts and compromises with your position. Try to present a picture in which the subject actually benefits or wins by your direction. When concluding any confrontation, the best results will occur if the subject feels satisfied.

Determining what someone else is thinking or feels is an art acquired by many law enforcement officers. To gain such knowledge one must first gain trust and reduce the sense of threat. People will generally be more receptive to verbal direction if satisfied with the outcome.

Voice

Voice is the third element of PAVPO. Voice in terms of police rhetoric stands for verbal character. We speak differently to the people around us. When speaking to a spouse or child, our voice has qualities of care and tenderness. In contrast, when we speak to our supervisor our voice may have aspects of concern, need, or discontent. Words can be repeated and reflect different meanings with tone variations. Tone indicates the speaker's attitude. Tone is part of an officer's overall voice. Voice is, however, the sum of several elements. An officer must know how and when to use certain voice elements. He must be flexible and ready to change his verbal character as confrontations change.

Once an agent has analyzed his audience, he must determine what role and voice to use. Role refers to the flexibility an agent uses to change his image. A role can be "good" or "bad" depending on what characterization the agent wants portrayed. It can be a father image to a juvenile, or shift to a dramatic role at a crime scene.

The use of a role is actually a means by which an officer seeks an end to the situation. Many times the role is determined by a past experience. One rule holds true in that we should treat others as we would want to be treated in the same situation. In general, empathy is a good position to take. As an agent shows empathy toward a subject he gains trust or at minimum, the attention of that subject.

Once an agent decides the rhetorical position he is going to use in regard to the subject, his language becomes crucial. The agent's voice includes his vocabulary used and tone he places on the words. The language must be in harmony with the role. Statements like "Look here, Jack" show no empathy and do not harmonize with a friendly role.

Aristotle, the father of rhetoric, stated we persuade others by 3 means: (1) By appealing to their reason, (2) By appealing to their emotions, (3) By the appeal of one character or personality. There are many other aspects of an individual we can appeal to. Examples are their beliefs, senses, prejudices, ethical backgrounds, or securities and insecurities.

An agent must be aware of the different connotations words carry. Indeed these hidden connotations can carry great force. Connotations result in emotional changes due to association of a particular word based on beliefs.

Purpose and Organization

The final 2 elements of PAVPO are Purpose and Organization. These 2 elements are combined because of their nature. The purpose for a conservation agent relates to his enforcement of wildlife regulations and state statutes. An agent must know the laws he is enforcing. They are trained in the Missouri Wildlife Code. This training includes code interpretation and Department policies on how to perform law enforcement work.

The agent's purpose when he arrives at a crime scene or during daily field checks is to enforce the wildlife laws. He is society's arm for control. The agent must keep in mind at all times that his job is to determine the facts and find an end to the problem. Upon arrival, the agent many times will confront angry or intoxicated individuals who use verbal abuse. This verbal abuse is to confuse or initiate a bad response by the officer. Some people realize when caught in a violation if they can get an officer to overreact or use excessive force, they may get off. An agent must remember that some subjects are trying to get them to react. The agent must be open minded and not take exception to verbal abuse. Many times the offender is mad at himself and not the agent. The agent must constantly analyze these people for such a weakness.

To complete any task an agent must be organized. Organization is the final element in PAVPO. Organization allows an agent to achieve an end to a confrontation. An organized approach, whether it is the use of police rhetoric or tactics for an arrest, will bring out the facts and diminish bias assumptions. An agent must go through the first 4 elements of PAVPO before he can organize and plan his rhetorical approach. This decision by the agent in many instances must be made in a very short amount of time. To become an effective communicator, agents are instructed to repeat the 5 steps of PAVPO with each public contact. This repetition increases the agent's verbal communication abilities which are needed during dangerous confrontations.

Throughout the training program, conservation agents are instructed to follow the 5-step approach of verbal tactics. The initial contact is also stressed as an important factor. An agent must start each contact correctly with unbiased and flexible attributes. If he does this with his police rhetoric, he will achieve a positive and safe ending to the contact. The success of any law enforcement officer depends upon his ability to handle people.

The Verbal Tactic Training program instructs an agent how to use words or his verbal skills as a force option to control. Past personal experiences should be shared and discussed during the training period. These examples allow better comprehension of how and why verbal tactics work. This is further illustrated during the mock field check scenarios in which the agent trainees are confronted by an irate subject.

The Verbal Tactics Program is set up as a tool to aid the conservation agent during law enforcement contacts. The program, however, has many hidden benefits. It improves and strengthens the agents' communication skills with the public. Whether agents are giving a program to a local scout group, Lion's Club, or sports club, working an exhibit, teaching Hunter Education, or simply sitting in a coffee shop, they present a professional image of themselves and their department. Verbal Tactics Training will strengthen a department's overall training program in case of civil litigation brought against an agent, the instructors, or the department.

As our society progresses so does the need for increased law enforcement training. We as instructors must keep up with the ever-increasing developments in equipment, techniques, and laws. That training, however, must begin with the teaching of communication skills.

Literature Cited

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