

By: Thomas Renner

# TRAINING FOR SURVIVAL

## TRAINING PROVIDES REALISTIC INSTRUCTION ON HOW TO REACT IN ACTIVE SHOOTING INCIDENTS

In an international age where no organization is free from the threat of an active shooter, it is not nearly enough to have a response plan.

"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face," said St. Kathy Kelsheimer, a retired Marine police sergeant who is an expert on active attacker response and survival training.

Whether it's a business, school, church or any

other type of institution, the importance of putting a plan into realistic practice is paramount. Security professionals can devise the most brilliant strategies, but it's also essential for people to know how to react if security measures are breached. Even people

experienced in emergency situations can freeze in a crisis situation.

In almost all cases, people lose fine motor skills in real-life active shooting situations. Kelsheimer witnessed that firsthand during a training session designed to simulate the

shooting that occurred at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016. Fifty people died in the incident, and in the simulation Kelsheimer remembers watching an experienced firefighter freeze under the stress.

"It was eye-opening," ►



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Kelsheimer said. "People need to practice drills. When you lose fine motor skills and you go to lock a door, and can't, that's very surprising. If you're sitting in a classroom, book learning is a lot different than the real situation. That firefighter might have gotten an A on the written test. But in the moment of truth, he froze. Because of the training, he will know that if he has to go into a situation like that, his body could shut down. He will know that he will be expected to handle the noise and the pressure."

### **Situational training sharpens skills**

Troy Lowe has been training businesses, churches, schools and other groups on how to survive active shooting situations since 2014. He is also a SWAT Medic Team Leader and Tactical EMS Coordinator.

Lowe, who runs a Silverback Safety & Training Solutions, employs a five-step learning process. It includes:

- Tell the students the "how to"
- Demonstrate the "how to"
- Have the student perform

the task

- Have the student perform the task under stress inoculation
- Have the student teach back to the trainer directly coming off the stress inoculation

One of the main components to training is working under life-like circumstances. While classroom education has value, hands-on experience in a setting similar to what people might encounter in an active-shooting incident introduces a stress level with which they are unfamiliar. "The key to the stress inoculation is to make it as realistic as possible with emphasis on hitting the key life saving techniques they have been taught," Lowe said. "The reality is there's a physiological response in every person's body when a new stressor is introduced."

Dr. Kathy Platoni survived the shooting at Fort Hood Texas in 2009, where 14 people were killed and 33 injured. The Fort Hood massacre is the deadliest mass shooting on an American military base. She found active shooting

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training was frighteningly realistic. "It's unmistakably life like," she said. "I had flashbacks to Fort Hood when I went through it the first time," she said.

Training can be held at businesses, schools, churches or manufacturing facilities. Greg Buxton helped bring in training at his workplace, an automobile manufacturer in Ohio. About 15 people from three shifts volunteered for the weekend training. "I think some people felt 'We're going to sit there and put tourniquets on,'" said Buxton, an engineering coordinator at the plant. "This is training for a tactical environment, which I think invigorated them. It's not sitting at a table and slapping on Band-Aids. It was like taking normal training and putting it on steroids times 10."

### **'No safe place in the world'**

Mike Wisner is a decorated Army veteran and no stranger to witnessing suspenseful situations. One of the most frightening for him was when a 17-year-old student opened fire with a shotgun at West ►



Liberty-Salem High School in Ohio in January 2017. The incident occurred just two miles from his parents' home.

"It was scary," said Wisner, a tactical SWAT medic and an instructor in tactical medicine. "These kids were running out into cornfields. It was the closest thing to being in the military I had ever seen. It brought the blinders off. If it can happen here, in central Ohio in a high school with just 400 students, it can happen anywhere. It's a ticking time bomb."

An FBI report released in May found that more than 200 people were killed in active shooter incidents in the United States in 2016-17. The shootings occurred in all sorts of facilities and businesses – nightclubs, hotels, churches, schools – and ages of the shooters ranged from 14 to 66 years of age. There were 50 shootings.

"In this day and age, there is no safe place in the world," Platoni said. "What place is safe in our world? A school? A corporation? A hospital? It doesn't exist." Expanding the safety net

Jamie Wilson is the only nurse with any trauma training in the school district in Licking County, Ohio and trained alongside other district personnel. "By having training, now I'm in a community of people who know how to survive an active shooting situation," Wilson said. "If you're in Licking County, you have a pretty good chance at surviving a shooting."

Wilson said educators in the district understand basic first aid, but training takes it up a notch. "They understand it's not the end of the world if you're shot," she said. "It takes that base training to the next level where they can actually help save lives."

School districts in the United States have come under siege in recent years. There were 16 shootings and 28 deaths at U.S. schools in the first quarter of 2018. In May, there were five school shootings, leaving 17 people dead. The deadliest incident that month occurred in Santa Fe, Texas, where 10 students were killed and 10 others wounded by a student ►



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who had a shotgun and revolver. Multiple IEDs and pipe bombs were also found around the school.

“The training is necessary because of the world we live in and the kinds of issues our students face,” said Wilson, who travels around the entire county to help students. “We deal with emotional, physical and psychological trauma. You’re always wondering if it’s going to be you or your school next.”

Many U.S. school districts are using an intruder defense system designed by Lowe that securely locks entry points in lock down situations. The Barracuda, which is manufactured by The BILCO Company of Connecticut, saw a 400 percent rise in sales compared to the first quarter of 2017, after 17

people died at the hands of a lone gunman on Feb. 14 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla.

### Keeping emergency tools accessible

Platoni said even Fort Hood lacked the proper equipment to treat victims during that attack. “People were using belts, underwear, their uniform shirts as tourniquets,” Platoni said. “We were using table cloths as blankets. We didn’t think about lifesaving measures and equipment before because it just didn’t happen. Well, it does happen.”

Now she keeps a kit in her office and one in her vehicle. The kit offers information and gear for rescuers to provide life-saving interventions, such as tourniquets, multiple

trauma dressings, gloves, gauze, tape, scissors, emergency blankets, green/red identifiers for injured or non-injured people, and a large poster with step-by-step directions “You don’t have to know medical terms. It’s so unmistakably easy, even a monkey could use it. Every practice, every place of business would do well to have one,” she said.

If people are fortunate, they might not ever need training or an emergency aid kit. There is also the

chance, however, they might need to know how to respond tomorrow, next week, or next month. There’s just no way of knowing when an active shooting incident might unfold that could have drastic consequences. “In this day and age, no one can say they will never be a target,” Platoni said. “If you’re an elementary school student or on the assembly line at Honda, you could be a victim in the line of fire. Unfortunately, I know that firsthand.”

