

Ventura Police Department

Tactical Decision Making Under Stress (TDMUS)

Scenario-Based Training

Scenario-based training (SBT) is a tool that law enforcement can use to ensure officer's experience and deal with the mental and physical reactions experienced in high-stress situations so when those officers face a real situation, they are as prepared as possible.

In a dangerous police contact, the factor that primarily determines whether officers perform in the correct manner or make errors that result in harm to them, is how well they can manage the stress that they are exposed to at a moment of crisis.

The purpose of the TDMUS training is to provide officers with tools and skill to control what their brains and bodies do when they encounter unanticipated, rapidly changing, or chaotic threat conditions.

The skills in TDMUS are transferred through scenario-based instruction. The responsibility of the scenario itself is to induce some form of startle reaction in the participating officer(s), forcing them to adapt to unanticipated or rapidly changing conditions under high levels of stress.

Decision making requirements

- Officer must understand the tactical procedures demanded by the task and necessary/appropriate control measures

- They must be shown how they reacted to the unanticipated threat condition by reviewing their performance.
- They must be helped to identify what effect the stress of the moment had upon what they saw, what physical/mental reactions they had to the unexpected threat, and how their internal reactions affected what they did.
- They must be aided to determine whether their actions in scenario were driven by reasoning, planning, or some other intentional/purposeful action.
- They must be given easy-to-use techniques to initiate and maintain intentional, organized mental activity, perceptual activity, as soon as their brain registers a threat.
- Intentional mental and perceptual activity ensures that the “thinking brain,” the part of the brain that assesses, prioritizes, decides, and organizes the behaviors needed to accomplish officer goals, remains in control of what the officer does to manage the scene.

Mental Controls for Tactical Decision Making

The first stage serves to stabilize and control the levels of internal excitation produced within the officer in response to unanticipated threat:

- Slow and deep breath in through nose until trunk is inflated, then hold a second, then do strong exhale through mouth;

The second stage enables officer to effectively read the scene and prioritize the different areas of responsibility the officer must control and manage:

- Take snapshots of the scene like a laser beam seeking targets, registering all areas of responsibility
- Prioritize the different responsibilities that must be managed
- Purposefully scan across each sense and open vision wide to take in entire scene

The third stage enables the officer to self-regulate with a “quick test” to confirm that their intended tactical plan is indeed the correct option for them

- Identify any problems to plan and perform a “quick test”
- Make decisions and apply tactics under conscious control