



# El Segundo Police Department

## Training Section

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## TRAINING BULLETIN

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### Training Bulletin

#### The Objective

*by Scott Savage*

In this month's article, we'll look at a decision-making cycle that can help you make better decisions in the field. Law enforcement is under more scrutiny than any other time in history. In particular, it's the decision making of patrol officers that tends to get the most attention. After all, it's an officer's decision to de-escalate, fight, chase, shoot or otherwise engage that makes headlines. One way of making better decisions is by consciously asking ourselves, "What is my objective and what do I hope to accomplish?" Although this notion is simple, the practice of making sure we have a clear and legally defensible objective can mean the difference between failure and success.

The objective is the specific goal we intend to accomplish in a given situation. Law enforcement officers are routinely called to scenes that are tense and uncertain. We often deal with family members who are upset with each other, mentally ill persons, people under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, and armed individuals. These situations are ripe with potential problems for us so having a clear objective in mind helps guide our thinking and response. One way to determine the objective is to follow a logical algorithm such as the one that follows.

**Understand** - In trying to determine the objective we must first understand the situation. A simple way of figuring that out is to ask ourselves "What do we really have here?" and "What's the crime?" Also being able to name an incident such as "This is a misdemeanor noise complaint situation" vs. "This is a possible kidnapping." can put the incident in perspective for us. We risk a lot to save a lot, and risk a little to save a little but we first have to know what it is we're dealing with.

**Conceive** - After gaining an understanding of the incident, we conceive all the various choices we have as how best to proceed. Through creativity and training we develop a broad range of ideas on how to proceed. Through experience, we begin to recognize commonalities between previous incidents and the one we are currently facing. We can then decide what actions have been successful in the past and which have not. (As explained in Malcom Gladwell's book "Blink", experienced individuals can generally move through this type of decision making cycle more quickly than their inexperienced peers because they have the real-world experience to draw from.)

**Constraints** - We then narrow down our plans by scrutinizing them under the microscope of the constraints we are under. Constraints can be understood by asking ourselves, "Am I bound by law or policy to perform certain actions?", "Are there laws or policies that prohibit me from performing certain actions?", "Will circumstances allow me to perform the actions necessary to achieve my desired outcome?" and "Do I have the requisite resources to do it?" We can then eliminate outcomes that are unfavorable because of constraints in resources, policy, law, safety, manpower, etc.

**Decide** - We try to expose an objective that is relatively safe, appropriate for the crime at hand, within policy and law, in line with the political will of our organizations, realistically possible and one that will also produce the desired outcome. After eliminating unfavorable objectives we are left with a remaining acceptable one.

With a clear objective in mind, we can focus our efforts on that objective and not squander time and resources on non-essential activities. We keep ourselves focused on the objective and not allow emotion or other irrelevant factors to interfere.

Be it a prolonged tactical incident or an everyday routine call, we as law enforcement professionals must be clear in why we are there in the first place and what we hope to accomplish i.e. the objective.

*Scott Savage instructs the Third Degree Communications courses entitled "Response Tactics for Critical Incidents and In-Progress Crimes" and "Interview & Interrogation."*