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# Competencies of the law enforcement special operator : implications for law enforcement organizations and police special operations

Geoffrey C. Greene

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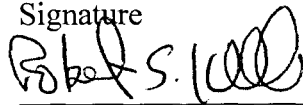
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## ABSTRACT

The law enforcement special operations environment is changing. Officers are faced with challenges that are increasing in complexity as weapons availability and acts of terrorism force the tactical community to respond with better training and tactics. The purpose of this study is to identify a competency model needed to successfully perform as a law enforcement special operator over the next 5-10 years. In addition, the study identifies the core competencies that formulate the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model. Implications for how police organizations can use the research for professional development are also discussed. This study utilizes three distinct phases of data collection. These phases, which include focus groups, a nationwide survey, and interviews with experts, result in a comprehensive Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model. The model consists of 46 core competencies bundled into four clusters. Police trainers and the field of higher education can use the model to build curriculums for tactical officers and leadership. A sample curriculum for a professional seminar is included in this research. Further research in this area could focus on using this research to create S.W.A.T. operator selection processes.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Resource Management.

Signature

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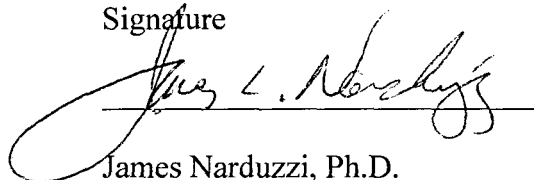
Robert S. Kelley, Ed.D.  
Adjunct Associate Professor

Signature

Handwritten signature of Patricia B. Strait in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Patricia Strait, Ph.D.  
Director, Leadership and Human Resources  
Program, School of Continuing Studies

Signature

Handwritten signature of James L. Narduzzi in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

James Narduzzi, Ph.D.  
Dean, School of Continuing Studies

**COMPETENCIES OF THE LAW ENFORCEMENT SPECIAL OPERATOR:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND  
POLICE SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

By

Geoffrey C. Greene

B.S., Virginia Commonwealth University, 1995

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Continuing Studies

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

for the degree of

**MASTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

May 2007

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Marilyn C. Greene. My mother has supported me every day of my life. At baseball games, football games, spelling bees, and school plays, my Mom's voice would rise above the crowd noise to let me know she was "with me". She continues to give me the gift of unfailing support every day. Because of my mother, I grew up learning, laughing, and inspired to meet challenges with confidence. Thanks Mom. During all of my graduate work, I knew you were with me.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Problem

#### Introduction

On August 1, 1966 Charles Joseph Whitman guaranteed his place in U.S. history and forever changed how law enforcement agencies deliver service. In less than ninety minutes, Whitman became one of America's worst mass murderers after he used a high-powered rifle to kill over a dozen people and wound over thirty more. Whitman climbed to the top of the observation platform of the University of Texas clock tower building in Austin. Once there, he randomly shot people on the University campus, until he was killed by police officers Ramiro Martinez and Houston McCoy. The Texas Tower Sniper, as Whitman became known, shocked people not just because of his violent actions, but because he committed random killings, in broad daylight, on a university campus. Furthermore, Whitman was not some deviant criminal with an extensive history of violence. He was a University of Texas honor student. Whitman's killings contributed to an increased sense of fear across the United States.

The Texas Tower sniping was not the first time a demented person had committed violence against random victims, but these events began occurring more frequently during the 1960's. Richard Speck's killing of eight nurses in Chicago just before the Texas Tower incident, along with growing anti-war sentiment, created uneasiness in the law enforcement community. The Texas Tower incident made it clear that police needed new strategies for dealing with increasing violence. Even though police eventually killed Whitman, the initial response to the clock tower was unorganized. Officers lacked training and the equipment necessary to address a sniper with a high-powered rifle who

was firing from an elevated position. Nationwide, police chiefs began scrutinizing their organizations and developing ways to meet the challenges posed by criminals using more effective tactics to commit violent acts.

As agency heads collaborated on ways to deal with the increasing violence, police chiefs began organizing special teams of police officers. Many of these teams became known as Special Weapons and Tactics (S.W.A.T.) Teams. Organizations realized that they needed a group of officers that could respond to critical incidents at a moment's notice to deal with people who were especially violent. "Special Weapons and Tactics moved into a new era after Charles Whitman climbed into the tower on the first day of August and shot forty-six people, fifteen of whom died", said Lt. Sid Heal of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (Snow, 1996). Retired Captain John R. Kolman, who was also with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, discussed S.W.A.T. development in his book *A Guide to the Development of Special Weapons and Tactics Teams* (1982). Kolman noted:

Prior to 1966, few if any law enforcement agencies staffed specialized teams to deal with armed barricaded suspects. Generally speaking, these assignments were left to the uniform patrol officer who may or may not have been prepared or equipped to resolve the matter.

The acronym S.W.A.T. was first used by the Los Angeles Police Department, whose team carried out law enforcement operations against the Black Panthers in 1969 and the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1973. Other acronyms in use include S.R.T. (Special Response Team), E.R.T. (Emergency Response Team), and S.E.R.T. (Special Emergency Response Team). Typically, these units relieve patrol officers and assume operations during situations that cannot be handled safely with basic police training and equipment.

Local police agencies, in different states, operate independently of each other. They answer to no central authority, so there are no national guidelines for when a S.W.A.T. Team should be utilized, or what a S.W.A.T. Team should be used for. Each organization must decide for itself how and when to deploy the team. There are, however, a number of incident types and criminal situations where S.W.A.T. Teams are most often used. One of these incident types is the service of high-risk arrest warrants. A warrants service usually becomes high-risk when the suspect has a history of violence and weapons use, or there is a high potential for violence based on intelligence gathered. Another common incident for S.W.A.T. Team deployment is a hostage situation. During these situations, someone is held against their will, and the initial attempts to secure the hostage have been unsuccessful. A third incident type is commonly called a “barricaded person” who, because of mental illness or criminal reasons, refuses to leave a fortified location. This person frequently has the potential to harm themselves or others with weapons or explosives. These three incident types create the bulk of the work for America’s S.W.A.T. Teams.

As stated before, since the mid-1960’s law enforcement agencies have faced adversaries who use advanced tactics, weapons, and equipment. The challenges posed by these adversaries require police organizations to train and equip all of their officers to meet new demands. Law enforcement response to domestic and international terrorism is the newest frontier for S.W.A.T. Teams all over the world. Police officers are now instructed on topics such as Suicide Bombers, Improvised Explosive Devices, and Identifying Fraudulent Immigration Documents. As responsibilities in the law enforcement community increase in quantity and complexity, S.W.A.T. teams are subject

to higher expectations. They must pay close attention to how their members are recruited, selected, and developed. Police organizations may also need to examine the effectiveness of their organizational structure, and to more strategically manage their human resources (Harvey, 1996).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research investigation identifies a competency model comprised of core competencies required of law enforcement special operators to successfully deliver tactical service over the next 5-10 years. This competency model provides a foundation from which police organizations and S.W.A.T. Commanders can build developmental tools. As universities around the world begin to offer degree programs in Emergency Management, it is possible that this competency model may be of use to institutions designing academic programs. This study examines modern research and literature as well as links S.W.A.T. operator high performance to specific competencies.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to answer the following primary and subsidiary questions:

Primary Question:

1. What is the competency model needed to be a high performing law enforcement special operator over the next 5-10 years?

Subsidiary Question:

2. What are the core competencies that form the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model?

### **Operational Definitions**

The following terms are defined for use in this study.

**Community Policing:** a policing philosophy founded in the belief that effective crime control is the product of police and citizens working together to find creative solutions to eliminate fear, crime, and other community problems.

**competency:** a characteristic of an individual that is related to superior job performance

**competency model:** a representation of core competencies identified for high performance within a specific job

**critical incident:** any incident where one or a combination of the following conditions exist

1. high potential for violence
2. an armed suspect
3. the suspect had a hostage or hostages
4. the suspect is barricaded
5. the suspect has a history of violence
6. the suspect made statements about committing violence towards police
7. the suspect has specialized training in tactics, weapons, or explosives

**law enforcement special operator:** a civilian (non-military) police officer who is a member of their organization's S.W.A.T. Team

**paramilitary policing:** a style of policing, used by civilian police organizations, that utilizes military command structure, tactics, and weapons.

**police:** law enforcement officers at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels anywhere in the world

**S.W.A.T. Team:** Special Weapons and Tactics; teams of police officers who are responsible for planning and delivering the law enforcement response to critical incidents

## **Significance of the Study**

Understanding the different roles police officers and S.W.A.T. officers will play in the future is essential to revealing competencies that are needed. Keepers of the peace, counter-terrorism experts, and community outreach agents are some of the roles that

officers fill in the modern police environment. Law enforcement special operators are tasked with performing jobs such as planning and conducting assaults on structures, deploying chemical munitions, conducting sniper/counter-sniper operations, designing training, and gathering intelligence. Increasingly, police officers are facing criminals and terrorists who have endured intense training and acquired significant knowledge relating to weapons, explosives, and tactics.

Discovering which characteristics create high performance is the essence of this research and the resulting model. The future of policing may hold significant threats to delivering effective police service. Some of these may include terrorism, cyber crime, and technology possessed by the offenders. Also, as the federal government advances legislation related to homeland security, police officers come closer to overstepping the line that divides law enforcement and civil rights. Recruiting, selecting, and developing officers based on properly identified competencies may give law enforcement agencies a strategic advantage when dealing with crime, personnel issues, and civil liability (Stephens, 2005).



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

Competencies have been a popular topic among human resource practitioners for more than a decade, but few modern law enforcement agencies utilize competency management to create a foundation for selection, development, or promotion. The vast majority of police agencies create minimum standards based on organizational philosophy and legal requirements. Traditionally, law enforcement organizations utilize a phased selection process that may include a written examination, an interview panel, and a medical evaluation. Beyond these minimum standards, there are few police organizations that have identified competencies from which to base human resource practices. As the practice of policing becomes more challenging and complex, it is crucial that police organizations identify key behaviors and traits that are related to high performance, and that allow for improved development of their personnel.

#### Competency Modeling

Interest in the concept of competencies evolved as a result of research in psychology, industry, and management. During the mid-twentieth century, business leaders began trying to identify traits that would make people successful managers. Companies began identifying key factors for success and designing training based on these perceived factors. In 1959, psychologist Robert White identified a trait that he called “competence”, and the competency movement began in 1973 with McClelland’s efforts to develop instruments that could test for predictors of performance (Mirable, 1997). McClelland’s focus was on reducing adverse impact on minorities and females in the

workplace, and he proposed that decisions about selection or promotion should be based on competence, rather than intelligence tests or other commonly used qualifiers.

McClelland's work in 1976 resulted in the introduction of the Job Competency Assessment Method (JCAM) (Whetzel, 2000). The Job Competency Assessment Method is an observational and analytical method of developing a competency model for a specific job. Competencies and associated models have become an important part of the strategic human resource plans for many organizations.

Experts have many opinions about how competency models should be developed and many different opinions about how to define a competency. Some professionals in the field of industrial and organizational psychology use a broad definition and define competencies as the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) necessary to perform a job (Bemis, Belenky, and Soder 1983). Others believe that knowledge, skills, and abilities cannot be true competencies unless they are demonstrated, in behaviors, by high performers doing a job (Boyatzis, 1982).

Competency is not only used to describe individuals, but the term can also be used when describing characteristics of groups (e.g. police officers, disc jockeys, basketball players) or entire fields of employment (e.g. public safety, entertainment, professional sports).

Three separate approaches are commonly used to identify competencies (Dubois, 1998).

They include:

Modified Task Analysis - normally used for non-complex jobs to identify cognitive and motor skills

Critical Trait Method - used to separate competencies of high performers from average or low performers

Situational Method - a comprehensive examination of a job that may utilize a

collection of data from internal and external sources, such as surveys or interviews (Zemke, 1982)

Data collection is accomplished using a variety of methods, but some common events occur during the development of most models. Initially, some means of gathering information about the job from subject matter experts takes place. Usually, this takes the form of a questionnaire, resource panel, or focus groups (Mansfield, 2000). During this stage people who are familiar with the job, usually high performers, are asked to conduct a critical breakdown of tasks, skills, and other characteristics relating to the job. Participants may be given a set of generic competencies and asked to select competencies that are important for their particular job. They may be asked to discuss the future of the job and emerging trends in business, technology, or the marketplace that may influence their job. All of this is done in order to put the developers of the model in close contact with high performers, so model creators can identify common competencies that are noted by the participants.

Another way to get this information is to conduct critical event interviews with high performers. These interviews require the interviewee to describe times when they experience successes, challenges, and failures during their job performance. Behavioral identifiers often emerge during the answers, and related behaviors can be bundled or clustered together to construct the model (McLagan, 1997). Other methods of gathering competency data include observation of high performers, speaking with industry experts, or conducting surveys of external customers. With good data collection and proper validation, the behaviors identified during these processes can become integral pieces of improved organizational performance.

Once competencies have been identified, many organizations choose to create a competency model as a means of organizing competency information. These models can sharpen the focus and provide clarity about how to drive performance towards objectives, and how those same people will support organizational values and culture. Good competency modeling requires analysis of the business, so that staff competencies are closely linked with the requirements of the business (Barner, 2001). Trainers and organizational leaders must be at the leading edge of the organization's initiatives if they want to develop meaningful strategies built around the organization's talent. Effective competency modeling requires planning and strategic implementation. Mansfield (2000) states there are a number of important questions that organizations should consider before and during the creation of a competency model. Some of the questions include:

- (1) What initial application will the model be used for?
- (2) Who are the key users and what will they need from the model?
- (3) How should the key users be involved in the creation of the model?
- (4) How should the organization balance research with intuitive approaches?
- (5) What format of behavioral descriptors will best suit the model?

Understanding how and why the model will be created is essential to building a model that provides maximum return on the investment of resources.

### **Critical Attributes and the U.S. Military**

Much of the research on competencies has been done for the United States Armed Forces. In a study published in the Handbook of Military Psychology, Taylor (1991) investigated what he called "Individual and Group Behaviour in Extreme Situations and Environments." The study focused primarily on individuals in the military, who were

likely to be exposed to warfare environments. The research also involved civilian and military personnel who are assigned to work and live in other extreme environments such as polar regions, submarines, and outer space. Taylor found that some people possess abilities to perform and survive in difficult circumstances, while others do not. He notes:

Various stressful situations have been described that show human beings in some form of interaction with their restricted environments. To the extent that the people were able to cope with their restrictions they succeeded in their endeavors and were survivors; to the extent that they succumbed, they failed and were victims. The problem for people in authority is to ensure that the number of survivors increases and the number of victims decreases. (p. 503)

The U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) released a study in 1999 entitled "Predicting U.S. Army Special Forces Field Performance." The study, which was published in *Human Performance in Extreme Environments*, focused on individual characteristics of successful performers in the U.S. Army Special Forces. These characteristics, or "attributes critical to performance", could then be used by the Army to create better recruitment, selection, and soldier readiness. Kilcullen (1999) and a group of Army researchers surveyed Special Forces subject matter experts and identified 30 "Critical Individual Attributes" clustered into four separate groups. The four groups were labeled (1) cognitive attributes, (2) communication attributes, (3) interpersonal/motivation/character attributes, (4) and physical attributes. Cognitive attributes contained competencies such as judgment and decision-making, planning, adaptability, and perceptual speed and accuracy. Each critical attribute was matched with at least one behavioral characteristic to illustrate how the attribute revealed itself during job performance. For instance, the attribute of "Adaptability" was linked with the behavior described as "able to switch gears; modifying plans to fit the situation."

Attributes clustered under Communication were reading ability, writing ability, language ability, communication ability, and non-verbal communication. Behavioral indicators included (1) read and comprehend written materials, and (2) learn new languages quickly. Some of the attributes listed under Interpersonal, Motivation, and Character attributes included diplomacy, maturity, autonomy, team playership, and motivating others. Behaviors associated with these attributes included (a) being tactful, pleasant, and diplomatic towards others, (b) remaining calm under stress, (c) being confident and comfortable when working alone, (d) supporting the team effort, and (e) setting an example for others. As mentioned before, the final cluster was labeled Physical Attributes. Attributes associated with this cluster included swimming using water survival skills and avoiding water hazards, kneeling or getting into awkward physical positions, pushing/pulling heavy objects, and running/skiing and climbing to maintain a high level of physical readiness. The Army Special Forces research utilized rigorous data collection to allow for predictive validity, but the first step was the identification of the critical attributes by the experts.

In November 2001 the United States Air Force partnered with a private contractor, Conceptual Mindworks, Inc. of San Antonio, to evaluate the success of their Air Force Special Duty Assessment and Selection Program. The study, which was completed in February 2004, revealed that the program was successful overall, but several recommendations were made to improve Air Force practices. One of the most significant research accomplishments was the identification of Critical Attributes possessed by Air Force personnel assigned to special duty. Some of these included:

- (1) Stress Tolerance

- (2) Effective Intelligence and Problem Solving
- (3) Motivation and Commitment
- (4) Integrity
- (5) Maturity and Self-Awareness
- (6) Positive Impact of Family

The study allowed Air Force leadership to better understand characteristics of successful performers, as well as what behaviors predict high performance once the person is placed into a special duty assignment. Clarity regarding Critical Attributes could then be used to modify selection tools and increase the accuracy of selection decisions about special duty assignments.

The U.S. Navy's Center for Naval Leadership uses the Navy Leadership Competency Model (NLCM) to represent required competencies at all levels of Navy leadership. The Navy Leadership Competency Model is based on five core competencies. These are (1) Accomplishing Mission, (2) Leading People, (3) Leading Change, (4) Working with People, and (5) Resource Stewardship. Each core competency is broken down into behavioral characteristics and/or sub-competencies. The Navy uses the model to clarify workforce standards, align individuals with strategy, and increase the effectiveness of the Navy training and professional development programs by linking the curriculum to competencies.

Research on competencies, or critical attributes, for the U.S. military has been popular for the past decade. Perhaps out of necessity, the Armed Forces have spent considerable time and money identifying the characteristics and behaviors that separate high performers from those who are average. Green Berets, Navy Seals, Air Force Para-

Rescue jumpers, and other military special operators often conduct their business in extreme environments under extreme conditions. Successful performance in those situations may save the lives of soldiers and civilians, as well as protect U.S. domestic security. As conditions change in the civilian law enforcement community, police organizations can draw from the research done by the military in order to create selection, training, and developmental tools for law enforcement special operators.

### **Paramilitary Policing**

Paramilitary policing has been a much-debated topic among law enforcement professionals and civil libertarians. Incidents of accidental deaths and unlawful entries into the homes of innocent civilians have fueled the controversy. Police organizations continue to mobilize S.W.A.T. Teams and train with advance weapons and tactics in response to increasing gun violence and terrorism. Police special operations have been viewed by some as expensive and not worth the return on the investment training and time (Holden, 1986). In a study by Stevens and MacKenna (1988) for the University of Texas at Arlington, data about police ability to respond to violence was collected from 186 police agencies. They concluded that, because violence can be spontaneous or pre-planned, police officers must respond with the skills and training necessary to handle the situation. They also write, “Hostage situations, barricaded persons, clashes with those involved in illicit drug trafficking, and other major threats to public order are a few important reasons why urban police agencies must have effective special operations capabilities” (p.118).

The study also noted that there were ten tests or requirements reported by the responding agencies, which were viewed as minimal qualifications for assignment to a



special operations unit. Eighty-four percent stated they required completion of a physical fitness test. Eighty-two percent stated they required an officer to achieve a minimum number of years in service before applying to a special operations assignment. Eighty-one percent required a firearms proficiency test, and sixty-eight percent required their officers to achieve some level of rank before they were eligible to apply for special duty. Other tests or requirements reported were related to educational achievement, psychological testing, and prior tactical training. The study concluded that, while considerable debate does exist over the necessity and usefulness of S.W.A.T. Teams, the “tactical unit concept” has been widely accepted in law enforcement for addressing critical incidents.

Kraska and Kappeler (1997) conducted research into what they called the “militarizing of American police”, and the normalization of military style policing units. They summarized the results of a 40-item survey designed to measure how many police organizations have created paramilitary units, how frequently the units are used, and how the units accomplish organizational objectives. The study revealed a steady increase in the creation of paramilitary police units from 1966-1995. The study also noted a rise in the frequency that paramilitary units were deployed between 1980 and 1995. Kraska and Kappeler contend that normalization of paramilitary policing units (PPUs) has occurred because of the strong link between civilian police special operations and the U.S. military. According to the study, the road to paramilitarization is paved with government rhetoric such as the “War on Drugs”, or the “War on Poverty”. The evolution of deadly force tactics and chain of command models have also directly influenced how civilian police organizations conduct operations. Kraska and Kappeler note that military tactics

are used to provide structure in military style “boot camps”, and military tactics were utilized in such infamous incidents such as Waco and Ruby Ridge. In a separate article, Kraska (1996) noted that military personnel from all branches “were becoming socially useful by involving themselves in both domestic and international drug law enforcement” by the early 1990’s. This study warns against ignoring the normalization of paramilitary policing, and Kraska states blurring the line between the military and civilian police is a behavior normally associated with “repressive governments.” The Kraska and Kappeler study concludes as the authors describe what they call “policy-specific dangers” associated with the use of paramilitary police units. They argue citizens should be aware of four main dangers;

- (1) Militarism creates or escalates the view that social problems can be most effectively solved through military tactics such as using force and technology;
- (2) The creation of elite paramilitary units within the agency can be infectious to the agency and the policing institution, and provides a direct link for the use of military weapons and tactics to become part of routine policing;
- (3) Although paramilitary units believe that their existence creates a higher degree of safety for officers and citizens, several high profile incidents may have created doubt about the effectiveness and dangerousness of these units;
- (4) Paramilitary policing poses problems for everyone, not just citizens in large cities.

These research findings are important for police organizations and S.W.A.T. teams, because agencies may want to link their definition of “high performance” to overcoming challenges noted by Kraska and others.

There has also been significant debate generated about the relationship between Paramilitary Policing and Community Policing. Community Policing has been a popular policing strategy since its introduction by Herman Goldstein in 1979. Goldstein advocated what he called Problem Oriented Policing, which called for police to focus on root causes of crime. Furthermore, the concept is centered on the idea that crime and disorder can only be successfully addressed if there is a strong bond between the community and the police. Community Policing differs from traditional policing in that it requires the police to openly communicate inside and outside of the organization. It also requires readiness to adapt to environmental changes and a high degree of interpersonal skill from police officers themselves. According to some critics, traditional policing lacks change readiness, clear communication across ranks, and proactive strategies (Summerfield, 2006). Many organizations have adopted a Community Policing philosophy, and at the same time they continue to develop their special operations capabilities. While some scholars argue that paramilitary police tactics are in direct contradiction to the idea of building partnerships within the community, many others believe that police paramilitary special operations are an essential part of sound Community Policing strategy (Kraska, 2001). Identifying competencies that allow S.W.A.T. officers to balance their tactical missions with their Community Policing responsibilities may be an important aspect of police competency modeling in the future.

### **Competency Usage in Modern Policing**

While research in the area of police competencies is scarce, there are some organizations that have begun using competencies to guide human resource practices. The National Police of New Zealand have identified ten core competencies for their

officers, and they define each competency to prospective officers in their recruitment literature. The New Zealand National Police identify integrity, professionalism, respect, commitment to governmental treaties, accountability, and influential leadership as some of their core competencies. This police organization identified several behaviors, and they categorized the behaviors using different value based titles. For instance, the sixth value listed on the organization's recruiting information is "Building Partnerships". The behaviors clustered under this value include:

- (1) Working cooperatively with others to build partnerships and achieve desired outcomes;
- (2) Actively networking to create and maintain relationships that inspire trust among all stakeholders in order to share information and coordinate action effectively.

The seventh value listed by the New Zealand Police is "Exercising Judgment". Some of the associated behaviors include:

- (1) Seeking out and making full use of all available information and experience to resolve situations;
- (2) Analyzing options and associated risks while considering possible solutions within time constraints;
- (3) Making sound decisions and recommendations.

The New Zealand National Police have integrated their competency model into their recruiting and hiring processes. The agency has gone a step beyond the traditional posting of minimum qualifications by clearly stating the desired traits of police officer applicants. Rodriguez (2002) writes:

By focusing on the full range of competencies or the whole-person assessment, the emphasis is on potential, or what the person can bring to the organization, rather than a set of narrowly defined tasks based on job requirements. (p. 314)

In northwest England, the Merseyside Police list competencies with their recruitment information as well. Like New Zealand, the Merseyside Police have listed clusters of behaviors under each of the identified competencies. For instance, under the competency of “Effective Communication”, behaviors listed include:

- (1) Communicates all needs, instructions, and decisions clearly
- (2) Adapts the style of communication to meet the needs of the audience

Under the competency of “Resilience”, the Merseyside Police have listed behaviors such as:

- (1) Remains calm and confident
- (2) Responds logically and decisively in difficult situations

Merseyside makes it clear that these behaviors and traits are desirable for their police officers. Like their New Zealand counterparts, Merseyside has integrated competencies into their human resource practices.

In the U.S., there are relatively few examples of law enforcement agencies that use competencies for selection or training. In 1999, Texas partnered with the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement to request data from 2,381 law enforcement agencies across the United States. The Commission created a survey that asked police officers to rate the importance of competencies listed by the commission. The respondents listed integrity, self-control, dependability, and writing ability as the most important attributes.

The United States Park Police uses the term “competencies” to describe everything from the basic patrol officer responsibilities to behaviors associated with high

performance. For instance, one competency is listed as “makes physical arrests”, which is a basic task associated with all police officers regardless of performance levels. The U.S. Park Police have also listed “takes charge of high stress incidents” as a competency, which may be viewed as a characteristic associated more often with high performing officers. The U.S. Park Police have chosen to include basic knowledge, skills, and abilities as part of their overall competency model.

In the relatively small City of Newark, Delaware, the Newark Police have identified “critical attributes” they seek in their police officers and applicants. They describe these critical attributes, as “positive characteristics” needed to “effectively perform the duties of police officer.” They go on to state that police officers must have initiative, judgment, motivation, compassion, and common sense. While the City of Newark does not list specific behaviors associated with the critical attributes, they are one of the few police agencies in the U.S. to separate competencies from minimum qualifications.

In 1999, the Boston Police Department utilized competency modeling to identify core competencies needed to be a high performer practitioner of Community Policing. This was done in an attempt to advance Community Policing strategies, fulfill its mission, and develop future training around the strategies. Their model was created as a model for best practices across the entire organization, as opposed to creating a model for individual jobs within the Boston Police Department.

While the use of competency models by law enforcement agencies is relatively new, the above examples illustrate how competencies and models are being used in the criminal justice field now. Determining what purpose competency identification will

serve, and how the competencies will influence human resource practices, is a job for each organization individually. Lynton and Elman (1988) write:

If individuals are to function effectively as citizens, as members of a social group and in their occupations, they must be able to cope with complex realities and rapid change, to tolerate and deal with considerable uncertainty and ambiguity, to make sense of a flood of disjointed and often contradictory data, to assess risks, and at times to choose among competing humans and ethical values. (p.44)

In the new reality of modern policing, agencies must be able to prepare officers for everything from mundane administrative tasks to complex situations, which require flexibility and critical thinking under extremely stressful circumstances.

### **The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST)**

As stated before, the use of competency modeling is not prevalent in the law enforcement or tactical community, but it does exist. The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) has identified core competencies for Special Weapons and Tactics Teams. POST also identified competencies for individual S.W.A.T. officers. It has been noted that understanding what the organization needs and values is critical to identifying competencies for individual high performance (Moody, 1990). The California Commission on POST linked teams competencies directly to individual competencies. The Commission lists three categories of S.W.A.T. Team core competencies. They are:

- (1) Weapons, munitions, and equipment training;
- (2) Individual and team movement and tactics;
- (3) Decision-making.

The Commission recommends training be related to these core competencies, and they also recommend “supporting resources” also receive competency based training. Also

included in the POST document are S.W.A.T. operator core competencies. Some of these include weapons maintenance, firearms skills, ballistic shield use, active shooter response, camouflage techniques, and covert movement. Others are related to decision-making, and include tactical contingency planning, barricaded subjects, and hostage situations.

The California Commission on POST model was developed over an eighteen month period using committees of subject matter experts who are police executives, S.W.A.T. specialists, and S.W.A.T. generalists. While the California model is progressive because it is possibly the only study that documents specific S.W.A.T. operator competencies, it only identifies competencies relating directly to technical competence. The Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model, which also used data from experts across the nation, identifies many competencies that are not directly related to field operations. Furthermore, most of the competencies identified by the experts in the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model are not directly related to weapons handling or tactics, but they were considered critical for high performance by the experts.

### **The Core Competency Model Project**

Perhaps the most significant research, in the field of law enforcement competencies, was The Core Competency Model Project (1997) completed by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Correctional Officers are responsible for securing and operating America's prisons and jails. The Core Competency Model Project focused on building a competency model for correctional leadership. Robert Brown, Chief of the NIC's Academy Division, began the project with a question. He asked, "How can we develop



curricula if we aren't sure what skills and abilities are required for success at the various levels of correctional management?" (NIC Jails Division, 2005).

The project team asked other questions in early meetings, such as:

- (1) What is changing about our environment relating to national demographics, globalization, workforce demographics, Boomer retirement, technology, and the different values of generations X and Y;
- (2) What is a competency;
- (3) What drives behavior;
- (4) How do you know a competency when you see it;
- (5) What are the potential uses for competencies?

The team decided that the term competency would be used to mean several things:

- (1) a human characteristic associated with high performance;
- (2) a cluster of attitudes, traits, motives, skills, abilities, knowledge, and behaviors. They also declared that a competency could be measured against accepted performance standards.

The team used a three-part strategy to create the Correctional Leadership Competency Model. The project was divided into a literature review, focus groups, and behavioral indicators and testing. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used during meetings and survey implementation. These efforts resulted in what the team called Phase I and Phase II competencies.

Phase I competencies were clustered under two categories, which were named Executive competencies and Senior Level competencies. Executive competencies include the following:

- (1) Self-Awareness;
- (2) Ethics and Values;
- (3) Vision and Mission - driven by values;
- (4) External Environment - spending time with constituencies;
- (5) Power and Influence - generating enthusiasm for leader initiated projects;
- (6) Team Building;
- (7) Collaboration;
- (8) Strategic Thinking.

The Senior Level Leader Competencies were identical to the Executive Competencies, but with one key difference. The team determined that the Senior Level Leader has a strategic planning and performance measures role that did not emerge for the Executive.

Phase II competencies were clustered under two headings as well, which were Manager and Supervisor. Manager competencies include:

- (1) Ethics and Values;
- (2) Interpersonal Skills;
- (3) Team Building
- (4) Collaboration
- (5) Managing Conflict;
- (6) Developing Direct Reports;
- (7) Problem Solving and Decision-Making;
- (8) Knowledge of Criminal Justice;
- (9) Planning and Evaluation;
- (10) Strategic Thinking;

(11) Change Management.

Supervisor competencies were similar, but strategic thinking and change management were removed and replaced with written and oral communication.

The NIC uses its Correctional Leadership Competency Model in order to achieve several objectives. First, the model is used when correctional professionals apply for different programs offered by the NIC. The NIC uses competencies to select the “best” participants. NIC staff members also consult the model when they are developing training, and the NIC’s leadership development curriculums are built around behaviors included in the model. The NIC also encourages local, state, and federal correctional professionals to use the NIC model as a “template” to design their own training. It is unclear if the NIC Core Competency Model Project has created higher performance or more capable leadership, but their commitment to the process is unmatched in the field of corrections.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative research study was intended to result in a competency model, which was constructed using sets of core competencies required of law enforcement special operators. Qualitative research involves methods such as participant observation, direct observation, unstructured interviewing, case studies, content analysis, and focus groups (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Data collected during this research includes participants' conclusions from focus groups, survey rankings of competencies, and the results of interviews with experts. The Flexible Job Competency Model, which is discussed later, was used to guide the research and model development process.

#### **Research Questions**

Primary Question:

1. What is the competency model needed to be a high performing law enforcement special operator over the next 5-10 years?

Subsidiary Question:

2. What are the core competencies that form the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model?

#### **Flexible Job Competency Model**

While different approaches may be used to identify competencies, a form of the Situational Approach was chosen to construct this competency model. First reported by Zemke (1982), the Situational Approach involves using several different techniques to gather data. This allows the researcher to triangulate the specific core competencies from large amounts of data relating to knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavioral indicators.

One type of Situational Approach is known as the Flexible Job Competency Model. This type of model requires the researcher to utilize numerous sources to gather comprehensive information, which forms the research foundation. This method may utilize experts that perform a particular job, or external resources such as experts from the industry in which the job is categorized. Law enforcement officers operate in a dynamic environment that requires constant assessment, adaptation, and change. Flexible job design and a flexible job competency process create readiness for change (McLagan, 2003). Preparing law enforcement special operators and the tactical community for change is critical to executing successful missions. Change management expert Patricia McLagan offers other advantages of flexible competency modeling and job design (Dubois, 1993). These include

- (1) forecasting future requirements of the organization;
- (2) accepting change and creating change readiness;
- (3) identifying requirements for job performance;
- (4) creating a strong foundation from which to develop accurate and effective tools for managing performance and development.

Using the Situational Approach means that competencies are revealed by surveying and collecting information from subject matter experts, industry experts, and others who have expert levels of knowledge about high performance in the job or field. Dubois (1993) outlines an eight-step process to successfully create a Flexible Job Competency Model. He states the first step is to simply collect information about the job. This should include all relevant historical data, tasks and activities, performance expectations, and

future requirements. This information will allow the researcher to be fully informed about the job before beginning the study.

Dubois recommends a second step that involves a panel of subject matter experts. The number of experts and how the panel is composed may depend on the nature of the study. He also states that senior leaders are the best source of information regarding future assumptions about the job, and how the job will be linked to strategic planning. Dubois states that subject matter experts currently performing the job will provide a “real-time picture” of the job. Finally, he encourages the use of external resources to provide additional expertise and broader perspectives about the job across organizational boundaries.

Developing assumptions about the job, both present and future, is the foundation of step three. Variables such as technology, environmental threats, legal compliance, and demographics are considered, and a picture of future job requirements is formed. Dubois notes that considerations about the industry or field as a whole should be considered, along with assumptions about the individual job and organization.

The fourth step requires the researcher to focus on successful performers, and to create a list of expected outputs for the job. The outputs should summarize the expected results of the work performed by the individual doing the job. For the law enforcement special operator, some of these outputs may include dynamic entry performance, perimeter deployment to contain suspects and gather intelligence, or overall success and safety of the missions performed.

The fifth step involves listing the identified job competencies and identifying behavioral indicators for each competency. Often, a collection of competencies is

presented to a panel of experts. The experts will then rank the competencies or brainstorm about the list until the data can be concentrated.

Clustering the job competencies to create descriptive job roles is the sixth step. Competencies created by the subject matter experts are grouped into congruous, pragmatic clusters. A role title is assigned to each cluster, and the role titles should provide a descriptive name that summarizes the competencies associated with the name. The researcher or experts may assign the role names.

Two more steps complete the Dubois process. Step seven involves bringing together all aspects of the research and finalizing the model, which should be comprehensive and usable. The final step brings stakeholders together to study the model and plan for implementation.

### **Content Validity**

The validity of the competencies identified for this model was considered in every step of data collection. This study is concerned with providing a model that is rich in content validity, and that is immediately usable by law enforcement organizations. Content validity, which is also known as logical validity, can be defined as the extent to which a measure includes all aspects of the social concept being measured (Rungtusanatham, 1998). Content validity is generally considered an acceptable strategy when the job is defined after thorough job analysis that identifies critical tasks, behaviors, or knowledge specific to that job (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1987). The Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (2007) state:

To demonstrate content validity of a selection procedure, a user should show that the behavior(s) demonstrated in the selection procedure are a representative sample of the behavior(s) of the job in question or that the selection procedure provides a representative sample of the work product of the job. (Section 14C-4)

Content validity, unlike predictive validity or concurrent validity, is not usually expressed numerically. Dubois (1993) stated that content validity is created when items on the test are analyzed objectively by a collection of subject matter experts. For the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model, subject matter experts brought validity to the identified competencies, and they also provided an efficient means of data collection.

One of the first people to use experts as judges was W.H. Angoff (1971), whose Angoff method is still practiced today. Angoff used experts to examine test items and determine how a “barely proficient person” would perform on the items (Buckendahl, 2000). CTB/McGraw-Hill, a leading publisher of standardized achievement tests, developed another popular method for scoring and ranking test items. This method, known as the Bookmark Method, is similar to Angoff’s method. The Bookmark Method uses expert judges to review test items and estimate how a “borderline barely proficient student” would perform on each item (Lewis and Mitzel, 1996). The items are then placed into a booklet and ordered from least to most difficult. The experts then review the booklet and place a bookmark on the page where they believe the student would stop answering correctly because the questions would become too difficult. The experts are then exposed to actual performance data from a student control group, and they are then asked to make a second bookmark placement. The use of experts to rank, assess, or cut items is an accepted manner of achieving content validity. The Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model used experts during every phase of data collection to provide basic competency identification. The experts also ranked competencies and discussed the work



to identify different roles that S.W.A.T. operators fill. These experts in law enforcement special operations built the model.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research has been described as work done to reveal “meaning that is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2000). Qualitative research assumes that our world and reality are not affixed to any single, measurable phenomenon. Common qualitative data collection methods include field notes, journals, and interviews. The qualitative research conducted for this research study was accomplished using multiple methods of data collection. Focus groups, surveys, and interviews were used to accumulate and interpret data. Data collected from all of these methods was compared to determine corroboration and qualitative cross-validation (Wiersma, 2000). Triangulation occurs when data is collected through different methods, in order to gain more accuracy and validity of results for a particular outcome (Oliver-Hoyo, 2006). Three groups of police special operations experts contributed to this qualitative research, and data was collected at different times, in different settings, from across the United States.

### **Step 1**

Focus groups have been proven to be valuable tools for researchers who are developing conceptual frameworks or guidelines (Sharma, 2004). Focus groups are in-depth, interactive, and result in qualitative data (O’Donnell, 1988). Twenty-one law enforcement special operators, who were identified as high performers by their commanders, were enlisted to provide the first set of competencies needed to be a high performing operator over the next 5-10 years. These officers represented four different

police agencies from the Central Virginia area (Appendix A-1). Four separate focus groups were conducted to gather the data from the high performers. A scheduled focus group with a fifth agency was cancelled because their team was activated for mission just prior to beginning.

During each focus group, several standardized steps were conducted. Each participant was told that participation was voluntary, and then the research and competency model processes were explained. The word “competency” was also defined in the preliminary explanation. The definition provided to each group was, “knowledge, skills, abilities, or other characteristics of high performers and the associated behavioral indicators” (Boyatzis, 1982).

Finally, the group was asked to write a list of ten to fifteen competencies of high performing operators based on the definition provided. Upon completion, each list was reviewed and clarification was obtained for any competency that was unclear in meaning. Clarification was considered critical, so the opinions of the participants would be clear and subject to little or no interpretation during later use. Removing personal bias allows for increased validity and allows for the competency model to be the natural result of pure competencies provided by experts. There were very few questions during the focus groups, and all of the operators were interested in participating. Most participants completed their lists in fifteen to thirty minute’s time.

Collecting data from S.W.A.T. officers posed challenges and presented a dynamic research environment. As noted before, one focus group could not be completed because the S.W.A.T. Team was activated for a mission involving a man who was sitting in his car holding a gun to his head and threatening suicide. Many of the participants, who

work non-traditional work schedules, came to the focus groups after being awake overnight. Two of the focus groups were held in a classroom setting, but the other two were conducted during the teams' training days. During one focus group, noise from small arms fire from the firing range created hearing problems for the researchers. Another group of high performers came together for the focus group immediately after completing a five-mile run. One of the first focus groups was delayed because the S.W.A.T. Team retreated to a private room to discuss issues of problematic performance from one of its members. The research environments ranged from combat-like to an academic setting, but all of the participants gave their full attention and provided comprehensive lists.

## **Step 2**

Step 1 resulted in the identification of over 150 raw competencies (Appendix A-2). All of the lists were reviewed, and redundant competencies were combined to reveal a list of eighty-seven individual competencies. These competencies were placed as individual items on an Internet survey instrument (Appendix A-3). A five-point Likert Scale format was used and linked to each item.

### **Example:**

Please rank each competency. A score of 1 indicates that the competency has no relationship to high performance, and a score of 5 indicates that you consider the competency essential to high performance.

1. Ability to solve problems under stress

1 2 3 4 5

## 2. Maintains and prepares equipment for rapid deployment

1 2 3 4 5

Item 88 prompted survey respondents to identify items that were redundant or confusing, and item 89 requested identifying information such as name, agency affiliation, and years of experience.

With the assistance of the National Tactical Officer's Association (NTOA), the survey was distributed nationwide to experienced S.W.A.T officers. Thirty-one responses were received from operators in various regions of the United States. Respondents ranged in rank from non-supervisory officers to Chiefs of Police. Some of the officers work on full-time S.W.A.T. Teams, but most work primary assignments and work on teams that are part-time. The survey participants have a total of over 400 years of police special operations experience. Various regions of the U.S. were represented, including the States of Florida, Georgia, New York, Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, and California.

The rankings completed by the survey respondents resulted in numerical scores for each competency. The scores would serve as the main method for eliminating competencies that were ranked the least valuable, and a cut-off score would be established later in the data collection process.

### **Step 3**

Twenty experts who possess significant experience working in police special operations were interviewed during Step 3. These experts were selected based on their experience and reputation in the tactical community. Most of the experts are active or former S.W.A.T. Commanders. The other experts are active or former police

psychologists with many years of experience observing the behaviors of tactical operators and Commanders. The use of expert interviews has been identified as an accepted way to gather competency information (McClelland, 1998).

The interview subjects were identified and selected using information from the National Tactical Officer's Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and referrals from interviewees. Potential interview subjects were asked to provide a professional biography, and those officers with significant police special operations experience were selected for interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted over the phone, several were completed through e-mail due to scheduling conflicts, and one interview was completed in person. In two cases, e-mail interviews were utilized because the interview subjects are deployed with the U.S. military outside of the United States. Overall, thirteen active or former Commanders, four police psychologists, and three expert operators completed interviews. These Commanders and operators have accomplished over 200 years of total law enforcement service. All of the psychologists have extensive experience working with tactical officers and supporting tactical operations. Two of the expert operators are nationally recognized for their expertise on S.W.A.T. physical fitness and wellness, and one of the Commanders has written over 100 articles and two books relating to police tactical operations. Another Commander has earned a doctorate degree in counseling psychology. The interview subjects were asked to finish the following open-ended statement.

**“You cannot be a high performing S.W.A.T. officer unless you...”**

Some of the respondents spoke spontaneously and clarified answers as needed, while others wrote lists and organized answers based on categories of performance. The

interview subjects represented almost every geographic region in the United States. The States of Colorado, California, Oregon, Iowa, Virginia, and Florida are just some of the places the interviewees work. When necessary the experts were asked to provide more specific answers so that behavioral indicators could be identified and related to the indicators used in the survey. Exact phrases and words were documented for each interview subject, and these exact words allowed for careful comparison of the interview answers to the survey items. Validity was ensured as researcher speculation was minimized.

#### **Step 4**

During Step 4, the competencies that were ranked 4.0 or higher after the survey were reviewed and placed into preliminary clusters. Clustering competencies is an important part of building a usable competency model, and accurate clustering can allow for more clarity if the model is being used as a foundation for professional development programs (Stevens, 2005). Boyatzis (1982) notes that descriptive words, used by experts to illustrate competencies, are significant to the finished model. He states that descriptive words can be coded and quantified to examine the validity of the model. In order to create the preliminary clusters, descriptive words used by the experts were identified and considered during model development and final clustering.

#### **Step 5**

Subsequent to Step 4, research on modern competency models was completed in order to determine how the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model could be organized. Special attention was given to competency models created for government

and public service organizations, but models used in private industry were examined as well. The following competency models were reviewed:

- (1) The Manager Competency Model - Hay Group (2001);
- (2) Project Management Competency Model - Boston University;
- (3) Competency Model for Project Managers - Project Management Partners;
- (4) Leadership and Management Competency Model - New York State/Department of Civil Service/Governor's Office of Employee Relations;
- (5) High Performance Leadership Model - Tercon Consulting (2005);
- (6) Detailed Descriptions of Competencies - Maine State Government (2001);
- (7) Competencies for the National Park Service - U.S. National Park Service (1994);
- (8) Navy Leadership Competency Model - U.S. Navy;
- (9) Leadership Competency Model - U.S. Postal Service.

After examining characteristics of these different models, several common characteristics were noted. First, most of these models were developed as part of an overall training and development strategy. These strategies were usually used to address perceived weaknesses in the organization's leadership performance, or to address the potential for growth or change in the future. Second, some of the models had diagrams or charts that were visual representations of the competency model. Next, the models typically clustered the competencies into groups and gave the groups names. Finally, most of the organizations had expected the competency model would be an important part of clarifying workplace expectations and aligning individuals and teams with strategy.

After examining the above models, questions were posed about the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model (Mansfield, 2000). These questions, which were identified in Chapter 1, include:

- (1) What initial application will the model be used for;
- (2) Who are the key users and what will they need from the model;
- (3) How should the key users be involved in the creation of the model;
- (4) How should the organization balance research with intuitive approaches;
- (5) What format of behavioral descriptors will best suit the model?

The Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model can be immediately useful for two reasons. First, because no comprehensive model exists, the model creates a foundation from which all competencies based human resource strategies can be built. Second, because this model possesses content validity, professional development programs for S.W.A.T. officers can be developed based on the model, and current development programs for S.W.A.T. officers can be critiqued.

Key users of this model may include S.W.A.T. commanders, team leaders, operators, and police psychologists. Other users could include police chiefs and human resource practitioners. As noted before, experts, who are potentially the key users of the model, have provided all of the data for this research study. Allowing the tactical community to provide the competencies for the model may be the key to its acceptance as a useful developmental tool.

Also considered were questions relating to the formatting of behavioral descriptors and the balancing of intuitive approaches with research. After reviewing competency models currently in use, it was determined that the Law Enforcement Special Operator



Competency Model format would be based closely on designs currently in use. Competencies would be clustered and given names that are linked to the broad role that they define. Competencies would be listed under each role name in the order considered most important by survey respondents and experts, and a brief description of each competency would be included with the competency name. Usability of the model was considered critical, so after review of current models it was determined that the model should contain no more than 50 total competencies.

Each model user must decide for themselves how to balance research with their own experience and intuition. It should be noted that most of the experts who were surveyed and interviewed used many years of experience as a basis for answering the questions. Only a few based their answers on research or information derived from a source other than their own experiences. Changing or modifying the model should be done with the understanding that content validity could be significantly reduced.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The focus of this research is the creation of a usable competency model for the law enforcement special operator. The model is meant to serve as a foundation for professional development or for future research. The study did not differentiate between S.W.A.T. officers on full-time teams and those on part-time teams. Furthermore, the study did not distinguish operators who serve a single jurisdiction, from those who work on multi-jurisdictional teams. Finally, it should be noted that the model is concerned with competencies related to individual operators, as opposed to formal S.W.A.T. leadership. A model for team leaders and commanders would require further research,

and it would almost certainly contain competencies not identified during this research study.

While the competency information in this model was collected from numerous experts from across the U.S., the results are limited to the thoughts and expertise of the 21 high performers in the focus groups, the 31 experts who responded to the survey, and the 20 experts who provided feedback during the interview phase. Their opinions or experience may not be reflective of all S.W.A.T. experts. The model proposed in this document is considered to be a model for high performance, but it is understood that other models for S.W.A.T. officer high performance could be used effectively if they are created.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysis of Findings**

#### **Introduction**

Over a period of twelve weeks, competency data was collected from three groups of experts in the tactical community. The experts were asked to provide or rank competencies needed for S.W.A.T. high performance. The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings and answer the primary and subsidiary research questions posed in Chapter 1.

#### **Review of Findings**

##### **Steps 1 and 2: Development of Initial Pool of Competencies**

The focus groups in Step1 resulted in 215 competencies being generated by 21 expert operators. As the focus groups progressed, redundant competencies were often identified by group members and combined. This resulted in the identification of 87 core competencies. Competencies were not eliminated or changed by the researcher, because experts would conduct further competency examination during the next two phases. Allowing the experts to lead competency development ensured validity as well as credibility, because it reduced the likelihood that the researcher's personal bias would significantly impact the model.

The survey in Step 2 resulted in 31 completed surveys by experienced S.W.A.T. officers from all over the United States. Ranking of the competencies by these experts resulted in each of the competencies being linked to a numerical score. Scores ranged from a high of 4.97 to a low of 3.23. The average competency score was 4.5, which was well above the minimum score of 4.0 needed to remain in consideration for the model.

The high performing S.W.A.T. operators concluded that the competencies closely related to high performance were:

**Highest Rated Competencies:**

1. Able to solve problems under stress (4.97)
2. Able to make deadly force decisions swiftly and accurately (4.97)
3. Reacts quickly during evolving situations (4.90)
4. Remains calm and controlled under periods of stress (4.87)
5. Able to make swift/intelligent decisions at a moments notice (4.87)
6. Puts team success before individual success (4.81)
7. Able to lead non-S.W.A.T officers during tactical situations (4.81)
8. Is not afraid to make mistakes (4.81)

Nine competencies received a score lower than the 4.0 threshold. They were:

**Lowest Rated Competencies:**

1. Able to recognize and fix mechanical problems (3.23)
2. Dedicated to S.W.A.T. above all other duties
3. Possesses large amount of legal knowledge (3.81)
4. Uses non-police knowledge (mechanics, electrical) to add value to the team (3.83)
5. Has a high level of physical strength (3.84)
6. Is fearless in the face of danger (3.87)
7. Volunteers for extraordinary or unusual assignments to benefit the team (3.93)
8. Stays abreast of new technologies (3.97)
9. Is empathetic and respectful to victims, families, and suspects during encounters (3.97)

It was considered notable that, aside from the competency “Able to recognize and fix mechanical problems” and “Dedicated to S.W.A.T. above all other duties”, seven of the lowest ranked competencies missed the 4.0 cut-off by two-tenths of a point or less. This revealed that the survey respondents had very little disagreement with the competencies generated by the focus groups.

A final part of the survey requested feedback from the participants regarding their survey experience. The question posed was:

**“Were any of the competencies redundant or confusing? Please explain.”**

The responses to this question allowed for identification of several redundancies and competencies that needed clarification. Information about professional experience and agency affiliation was also solicited at the end of the survey. Twenty-eight of the 31 respondents provided some sort of identifying information.

**Step 3: Expert Interviews**

The researcher received many responses to interview requests after soliciting assistance from the National Tactical Officer’s Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Offers of assistance, from experienced Commanders and psychologists, came from across the United States. A review of each potential interview subject’s professional qualifications was conducted, and twenty experts were selected for interviews.

The experts often used the same words or phrases to describe competencies and behavioral indicators associated with high performance. Very often, words like “reliable” and “committed” were used to describe S.W.A.T. officers. Also, many of the experts noted that good operators were good police officers first. Many experts stated that the best operators create a history of high performance as patrol officers or investigators before they become S.W.A.T. officers. The ability to practice “regulated aggression and use appropriate force” (4.55) was mentioned as critical by many experts. Most of the experts were not aware of the competencies identified during the focus groups and listed on the survey. Some of the most frequently mentioned competencies discussed by the experts during interviews include:

### **Frequently mentioned competencies:**

1. Remains calm and controlled under periods of stress (4.87)
2. Able to operate in extreme conditions (weather, terrain, gas)(4.55)
3. Reacts quickly during dynamic situations (4.90)
4. Able to make deadly force decisions swiftly and accurately (4.97)
5. Has mastered techniques relating to perimeter deployment (4.58)
6. Has mastered techniques relating to dynamic entry (4.71)
7. Has mastered the use of all issued firearms (4.65)
8. Demonstrates a high level of patience (4.26)
9. Is self-motivated (4.71)
10. Constantly seeks higher performance (4.58)
11. Is a positive ambassador for the team (4.55)
12. Stays focused on tasks/mission (4.58)
13. Displays confidence without arrogance (4.52)
14. Maintains a high level of cardiovascular/physical endurance (4.23)
15. Practices regulated aggression and appropriate use of force (4.55)
16. Communicates clearly under stress (4.55)
17. Anticipates problems and develops contingencies (4.73)
18. Sees the “big picture” when making decisions
19. Able to work independently or with the team without specific guidelines (4.36)

These competencies were linked with expert interviews because two or more of the experts mentioned them specifically, or because they used words or phrases that were very similar to the competencies in the survey. Other competencies, which were generated from the focus groups, were not mentioned frequently by the interview subjects. Some of these include:

### **Infrequently mentioned competencies:**

1. Maintains and prepares equipment for rapid deployment (4.65)
2. Open to new ideas and advanced training (4.58)
3. Sets personal goals related to team goals (4.67)
4. Able to receive criticism (4.38)
5. Able to follow orders (4.68)
6. Takes charge when needed regardless of rank (4.58)
7. Leads S.W.A.T. officers and others by example (4.68)
8. Develops multiple solutions to a single problem (4.51)
9. Gets results with limited resources (4.32)
10. Able to take calculated risks to achieve the mission (4.45)

After examination of the interview results, there is one primary reason offered by the researcher to explain why the above competencies were mentioned infrequently. Because most of the interview subjects are current or former S.W.A.T. Commanders, they tended to answer conceptually. The psychologists tended to utilize behavior groups, such as cognitive or resilient. Ultimately, the infrequently mentioned competencies were not considered to be less important to high performance, and revealing these competencies could create discussion among commanders or other model users about their importance.

#### **Step 4: Building the Competency Clusters**

The above steps resulted in the development of four competency clusters. Based on the data collection, the following four groups were identified. They are (1) Artful Warrior, (2) Selfless Achiever, (3) Balanced Professional, and (4) Combat Strategist. Each cluster title was carefully chosen after exhaustive examination of related competencies and consideration of potential stakeholders. These clusters are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

#### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to build a competency model comprised of a set of core competencies required of law enforcement special operators over the next 5-10 years. The model was created after core competencies were gathered from experts and clustered into four groups.

**Primary Question: What is the competency model needed to be a high performing law enforcement special operator over the next 5-10 years?**

The Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model is comprised of four unique components. Each component is a cluster of core competencies, and each cluster has been given a title. The title captures the spirit of each cluster group and provides

clarification about the general nature of the role. The competency model is represented in the following way.

### **Cluster 1: Balanced Professional**

The role of Balanced Professional is to understand that balance is the key to high performance. The Balanced Professional has learned that relationships with police officers, S.W.A.T. officers, and other people outside of law enforcement have a direct impact on performance. The Balanced Professional maintains ethical behavior when away from work, and he/she maintains healthy personal relationships that promote stability. Physical fitness is critical to the Balanced Professional, as he/she is focused on a healthy lifestyle and cardiovascular endurance. Balanced Professionals also understand that besides relationship maintenance with others, they must maintain their own self-awareness. This means that Balanced Professionals have constant, honest internal dialogue about their own confidence level, humility, and weaknesses. These operators are acutely aware of their teamwork skills, leadership skills, and their ability to perform in stressful environments. Balanced Professionals are not afraid to fail, but they do not fail often. They communicate clearly, and they challenge their peers or other officers when appropriate. Balanced professionals will follow orders when it is not appropriate to challenge ideas, and when following orders is mission critical. Mental health and fitness are often more important to the Balanced Professional than physical fitness, and their behaviors will almost always represent maturity and confidence.

### **Cluster 2: Artful Warrior**

The Artful Warrior has numerous core competencies relating to his/her ability to provide tactical service swiftly and properly under almost any condition. They are



extraordinarily patient, and they are capable of moving aggressively while delivering appropriate use of force. They are experts in the areas of perimeter deployment, dynamic entry, and intelligence gathering. The Artful Warrior reacts quickly to unexpected changes while staying focused on the mission at all times. The word artful can be defined as “skilled”, and the Artful Warrior described in this model understands that police tactical operations are different from military tactics. Artful Warriors understand that skill, patience, and knowledge will be his/her most powerful weapon.

### **Cluster 3: Selfless Achiever**

The role of the Selfless Achiever is to support the team during training and missions, and to model behaviors that strengthen the team. Selfless Achievers put team success before their own personal success, and they understand that every one of their own actions could potentially impact the team in some way. These operators mentor new operators, and they motivate and inspire others through their words and actions. Selfless Achievers train with intensity, and they perform any task needed to achieve mission and team success. They are constantly in search of ways to build team unity and better performance, and they do not use the S.W.A.T. team for personal gain or attention. These individuals are ambassadors for their team, organization, and profession.

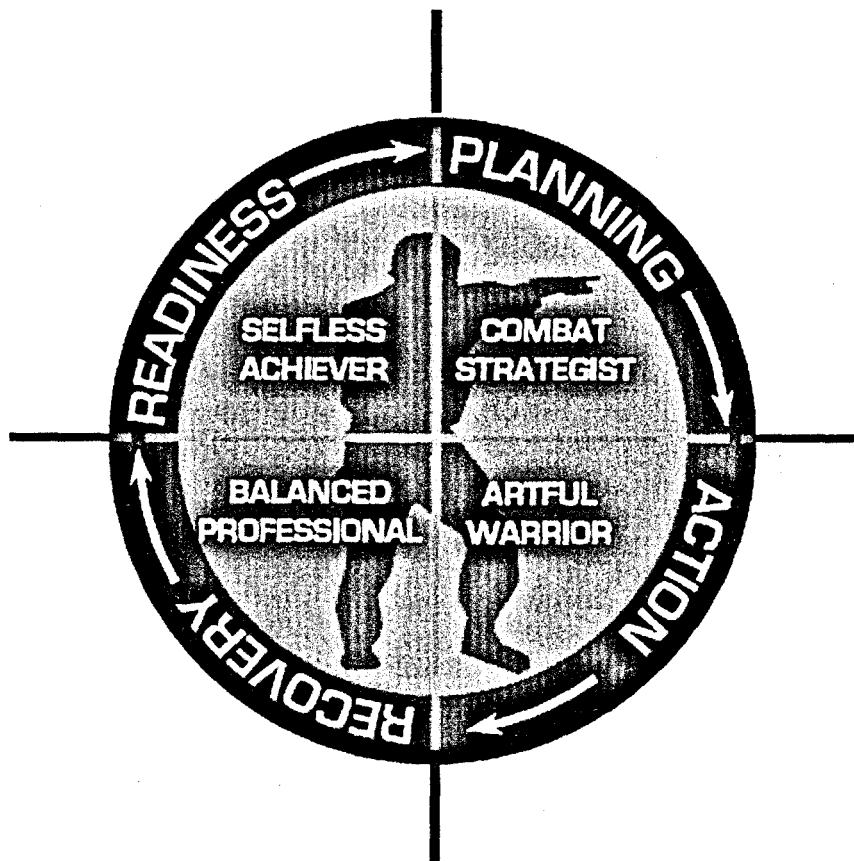
### **Cluster 4: Combat Strategist**

Planning actions and maneuvering in response to changes are critical to mission success. The role of the Combat Strategist is to provide critical thinking, planning, and decision-making as they relate to mission execution. While overall planning and strategy will be the responsibility of the S.W.A.T. leadership, it is imperative that all operators have the ability to analyze mission conditions and make strategic decisions. In addition,

Combat Strategists are able to make these decisions quickly and under stress. They are able to develop effective strategies with limited resources, and they can manage time effectively. Combat Strategists can perform multiple tasks at the same time, while under pressure. They have learned from past mistakes, and they are comfortable taking calculated risks when necessary. These individuals see the “big picture” when planning, and they create contingency plans in anticipation of problems or changes.

**FIGURE 4.1**

**LAW ENFORCEMENT SPECIAL OPERATOR  
COMPETENCY MODEL**



**Subsidiary Question: What are the core competencies that formulate the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model?**

The experts identified 46 core competencies that were integrated into the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model. The competencies are not evenly divided among the four clusters. The behavioral indicators were clustered as they evolved naturally during the data collection and interviews. The following information represents the comprehensive model, as roles are presented with all related competencies.

**Cluster 1: Balanced Professional**

The role of the Balanced Professional is to understand that balance is the key to performance. The Balanced Professional has learned that successful relationships, as well as self-awareness, can build confidence and maturity. This role blends numerous behavioral indicators with competencies related to mental health and physical fitness.

The core competencies include:

1. **Ethical Representative:** Maintains highly ethical behavior at all times;
2. **Self-Evaluator:** Able to conduct self-critique and receive criticism in a manner that promotes personal growth and learning;
3. **Confident Partner:** Displays confidence, void of arrogance, based on performance and ability;
4. **Grounded Operator:** Maintains a stable and healthy personal life and addresses dysfunction in a way that mitigates negative impact on the team;
5. **Endurance Athlete:** Maintains a high level of cardiovascular and physical endurance;
6. **Willing Follower:** Follows orders when giving feedback is not appropriate;
7. **Informal Leader:** Takes charge when needed regardless of rank;
8. **Model Performer:** Leads S.W.A.T. officers and others by example;

9. **Force Practitioner:** Practices regulated aggression and appropriate use of force;
10. **Clear Communicator:** Communicate clearly, even under stress;
11. **Disciplined Professional:** Remains calm and controlled under extreme stress;
12. **Decision Maker:** Not afraid to fail, but does not fail often;
13. **Flexible Colleague:** Able to work independently or with the team, with or without specific guidelines.

## **Cluster 2: Artful Warrior**

The role of the Artful Warrior is to maintain a high level of readiness, and to deliver high quality tactical service. The operator must do this, while practicing patience and building knowledge. The core competencies include:

14. **Resilient Operator:** Able to operate in extreme conditions (weather, gas, terrain);
15. **Equipment Manager:** Maintains and prepares equipment for rapid deployment;
16. **Receptive Apprentice:** Open to new ideas and new training techniques;
17. **Agile Operator:** Reacts quickly to unexpected changes;
18. **Force Agent:** Able to make deadly force decisions swiftly and accurately;
19. **Perimeter Expert:** Has mastered techniques related to perimeter deployment;
20. **Intelligence Expert:** Has mastered techniques related to preliminary intelligence gathering;
21. **Entry Expert:** Has mastered techniques related to dynamic entry;
22. **Firearms Expert:** Has mastered the use of all issued firearms;
23. **Patient Operator:** Demonstrates a high level of patience when needed;
24. **Tactical Student:** Retains training and builds on learning after each mission;

25. **Focused Operator:** Stays focused on tasks and mission objectives.

### **Cluster 3: Selfless Achiever**

The Selfless Achiever models individual behaviors that build better team performance.

They support the team, during training and operations, in any way needed. Selfless Achievers train with intensity and constantly seek higher performance. They motivate and inspire others with their words and actions. The core competencies for the role of Selfless Achiever are:

26. **Self-Motivator:** Is driven to succeed;

27. **Selfless Teammate:** Puts team success before individual success;

28. **Empathetic Teammate:** Considers the impact of personal decisions and choices on the team;

29. **Unfailing Comrade:** Is willing, during training and missions, to perform whatever task is needed to achieve success;

30. **Fraternal Teammate:** Does not use S.W.A.T. for individual gain;

31. **Ultra-Achiever:** Constantly seeks higher performance;

32. **Focused Apprentice:** Trains with intensity and is fully committed to drills and scenarios;

33. **Team Ambassador:** Acts as a positive ambassador for the team at all times;

34. **Team Motivator:** Motivates and inspires others through actions, words, and demonstrations of team spirit;

35. **Goal Setter:** Sets individual goals that, if achieved, will have a positive effect on team performance;

36. **Team Mentor:** Teaches and encourages new operators without being asked.

### **Cluster 4: Combat Strategist**

The Combat Strategist is proficient at planning, developing solutions, and creating

strategies. The Combat Strategist can accomplish all of these tasks with limited resources. This person is capable of planning for any type of critical incident that may arise. Combat Strategists think conceptually, and they use past experiences and learning to improve methods. These operators can utilize intelligence to create a preliminary plan until a formal command structure is established. The core competencies for the role of Combat Strategist are:

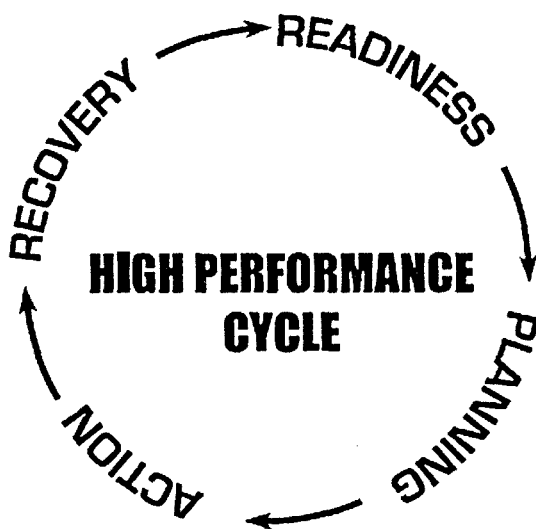
37. **Strategic Planner:** Able to solve problems and plan under stress;
38. **Dynamic Thinker:** Able to develop multiple solutions to a single problem;
39. **Strategic Visionary:** Anticipates problems and develops contingency plans;
40. **Creative Thinker:** Gets results with limited resources;
41. **Time Manager:** Effectively manages time under pressure;
42. **Multi-Tasker:** Able to perform multiple tasks under stress;
43. **Conceptual Thinker:** Sees the “big picture” when planning actions;
44. **Constant Learner:** Learns from mistakes and applies lessons, regarding strategy, to future missions;
45. **Risk Taker:** Takes calculated risks, when necessary, to achieve objectives;
46. **Environmental Analyst:** Recognizes opportunities and threats during planning and action.

Competencies were combined and removed in order to enhance usability and further reduce redundancy. Competency adjustments were completed after careful consideration all of data and expert interview feedback (Appendix A-3). According to S.W.A.T. officers, Commanders, and other experts, these are the behaviors and core competencies essential for high performance in the tactical environment.

## The Tactical Performance Cycle

As the competency model evolved from the data and interviews, the author identified four distinct states of existence. These states are interrelated, and they are linked in a manner that creates an identifiable cycle. The states are (1) Readiness, (2) Planning, (3) Action, and (4) Recovery.

FIGURE 4.2



In the state of Readiness, the high performing S.W.A.T. officer will be found conducting professional police work that may or may not be related to S.W.A.T. responsibilities. Training, mentoring, and team support activities are also conducted during this state.

The state of Planning is entered when the S.W.A.T. operator is notified that tactical service will be needed to resolve a critical incident or serve a high-risk warrant. The high performers are able to see the “big picture” when conducting initial planning. Because of

this, they can recognize opportunities and threats quickly, and they can perform multiple tasks under pressure. It is during the Planning state that past learning is applied, contingency plans are created, and risks are calculated.

The Action state finds the high performer utilizing expertise to perform perimeter activities, dynamic entry, and force delivery. This state also requires the operator to balance patience with controlled aggression. Effective equipment management becomes critical, because equipment must be present and in working order in this state. High performers will react quickly during dynamic changes in the Action state.

During the state of Recovery, S.W.A.T. officers can be found maintaining highly ethical behavior, and maintaining healthy personal relationships. High performers maintain their physical fitness, especially their cardiovascular endurance. Balance in this cycle indicates the operator's ability to be well rounded professionally and personally.

Examining the relationship between the clusters and the high performance cycle was important for two reasons. First, the cycle allows model users to recognize the link between the clusters and the operational environment. If the user is having difficulty executing missions or training the way they have been planned, they may be able to identify competency shortfalls based on the model. They will have a foundation to develop the skills needed to improve execution. Second, the cycle creates a context in which to view the clusters, which creates greater usability. The cycle, when shown in the model, allows the user to visualize the direct impact that competencies can have over associated states. Much of Chapter 5 is devoted to applying the research study to modern S.W.A.T. Teams for the purpose of officer development.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Implications for S.W.A.T. Teams**

#### **Introduction**

Within the traditional police environment, officers are trained in a paramilitary manner. Instructions are given, and officers perform the tasks to receive a score or a pass/fail grade. Officers, who meet a minimum standard score, are allowed to maintain their certifications and perform their jobs. This research study, and the resulting model, assumes that organizations with S.W.A.T. Teams require their S.W.A.T. officers to perform beyond the minimum standards needed for basic officer certification. Law enforcement special operators are asked to function in environments that require more independent thought than most non-S.W.A.T. personnel. The level of responsibility, especially during critical incidents, is higher for S.W.A.T. officers. Federal, state, and local police organizations understand that S.W.A.T. officers should possess above average knowledge regarding the use of force, tactics, weapons, and critical incident management. It is within the context of these assumptions that implications of this research and model are now discussed.

#### **Competency Based Development**

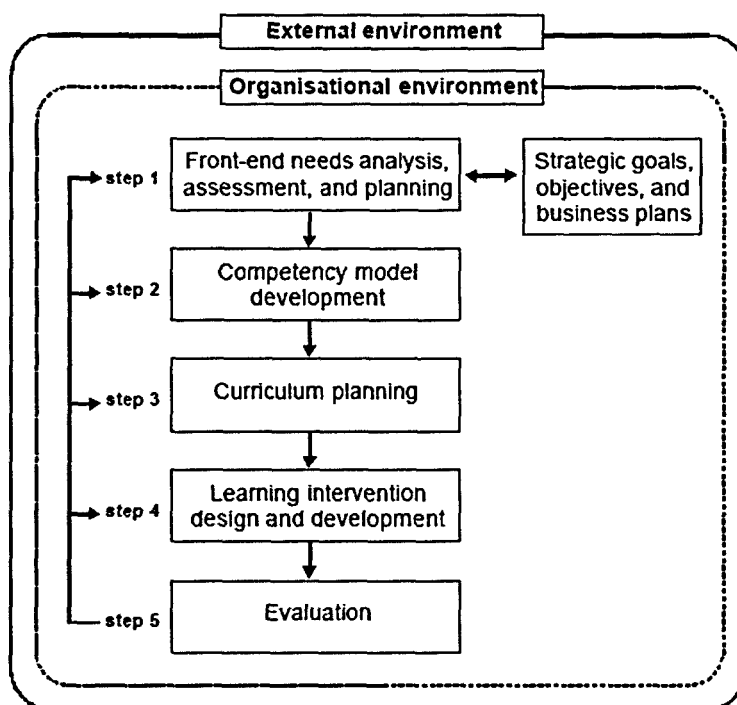
Utilizing the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model, as a foundation from which to build developmental tools requires organizations to use competency-based development as part of a systematic process (Svenson, 1978). Some competency experts believe that core competencies are different than “developmental competencies” (Elkin, 2001). For the purpose of this research, the word “development” will describe the special operator’s growth towards greater command of each of the four clusters, or roles

identified in the study. In this document, the word “development” will not imply a promotion or transfer.

A systematic approach to S.W.A.T. officer development would require several simple, yet critical steps. Moody (1990) stresses a systematic approach to competency-based development programs. He also emphasizes alignment of the programs with the organization’s strategy. Moody believes that the organization must decide what values and attitudes define its culture. Next, the organization must identify the knowledge and competencies required for high performance in that culture. Third, Moody suggests using assessment tools to ascertain current competency levels. Finally, training should be conducted to target core competencies. Dubois (1993) outlined a five-step approach to creating competency-based training and education. He states that the approach must be strategic in nature, and that the competencies used in the model must be valued by the entire organization. Dubois also believes that integrating competencies into training should be a systematic process. Dubois’ model is known as The Strategic Systems Model. Figure 5.1 shows the Strategic Systems Model, and shows the emphasis on needs assessment, model development, curriculum planning, learning intervention, and evaluation. Dubois reminds the user that Step 1 should always be conducted within the context of the organization’s strategic goals. A systematic approach also affords the stakeholders the chance to identify opportunities for development that are unrelated to training (Svenson, 1978). Interventions other than training could include work redesign, procedural changes, reference materials, organizational adjustments, and equipment modification.

FIGURE 5.1

## Dubois' Strategic Systems Model



### Developing a Curriculum

Traditionally, S.W.A.T. teams select their members after exhaustive background checks and rigorous tryout processes that may include firearms drills, obstacle courses, sleep deprivation, and small units tactical maneuvers. Once an officer has been selected, he/she will normally be assigned supportive roles such as logistical or perimeter duties. Over time, as the officer develops skills, he/she may be given advanced responsibilities that have more direct impact on the mission's outcome. In addition, operators who are thought to be comprehending different tactical disciplines will have the opportunity to attend specialized training such as sniper school, grenadier school, breaching school, or

explosive ordinance training. Identifying competencies necessary for high performance and developing training around those competencies could allow for more rapid acquisition of knowledge and skills. Focusing on competencies could save organizations time and money.

The literary review completed by this author revealed that competency-based learning strategies are usually developed systematically. Organizations that have identified skills or competencies are now ready to plan a curriculum. Dubois (1993) describes a curriculum by explaining:

A curriculum consists of a system of performance improvement opportunities, the content specifications for them, and the conceptual framework for linking the opportunities in a sequential manner that will provide efficient and effective learning opportunities for employees. (p. 26)

Curriculum planning is not simply a matter of conducting a needs assessment and intervening with training. Svenson (1978) discussed the importance of linking curriculum pieces together. He added that organizations may use “curriculum planning studies”, which could then result in a complete list of work functions, a list of outputs, and a rough curriculum map.

Subsequent to a sound curriculum plan, learning interventions can be designed and applied. Learning interventions for law enforcement operators could include classroom instruction, seminars, role-playing, and on-the-job performance activities. Utilizing the competencies identified in the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model, a hypothetical curriculum for a Basic S.W.A.T. Development Program has been created. As previously stated, this model was derived from qualitative research and contains content validity. The potential development interventions listed here would be used for the S.W.A.T. officer’s professional development, and not for the purpose of selection or

promotion. The focus of this model and potential development interventions is the non-supervisory operator. Competencies for specialized positions (e.g. sniper, breacher, team leader) would require additional research.

### **The Special Operator Curriculum**

Much has been written about workplace learning and the competency movement. When developing this possible learning intervention for S.W.A.T. operators, several research findings were considered. First, several different forms of workplace learning have been identified. These include formal learning, informal learning, and incidental learning (Watkins and Marsick, 1992). Formal learning, often known as training, is usually highly structured and sponsored by the employee's workplace. Formal learning usually involves planned classes and instructions on how to perform a specific job or role. Informal learning can also occur in the workplace, but it usually occurs outside of the classroom and it is not highly structured. Informal learning may not have a specific goal or a defined delivery method. Incidental learning occurs when the learner is intending to accomplish one task, and a byproduct of task accomplishment is an increase in some other knowledge, skill, or understanding. Learning in the workplace can occur in different ways, but employees very often identify work experience as the main source of competence. Working in teams or groups, and experiencing the actual work in a trial and error manner, has shown to be a powerful force for learning (Paloniemi, 2006). Users of this research and competency model should understand how people learn in the workplace.

The primary application of the research and model would be the creation of a Tactical Officer Development Course sponsored by a state law enforcement support agency, such

as the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (VDCJS). The mission of the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services "...is to provide comprehensive planning and state of the art technical and support services for the criminal justice system to improve and promote public safety in the Commonwealth." The V.D.C.J.S. currently offers training and certification in such areas as school safety, active shooter response, equipment purchasing, physical fitness, and firearms instruction. All of this training and the associated certifications are designed to increase the competence of law enforcement practitioners.

Utilizing the V.D.C.J.S. support, a 60-hour Advanced Tactical Officer Certification could be created. The six-day program would incorporate the 46 competencies identified in the Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model. The purpose would be to enhance basic skills and improve performance in all four roles defined on the research study. The target audience would include all S.W.A.T officers who have achieved two years of tactical service and who have completed some form of basic S.W.A.T. certification program. Upon completion of the program, officers would receive credit for all training hours and State recognition as an "Advanced Tactical Officer." The curriculum design could include:

### **Advanced Tactical Officer Development Certification**

**Program Duration: Monday-Wednesday (Two consecutive months/6 total days)**

#### **Monday (Month 1)**

- Transitions: The Present and Future of Police Tactical Operations in the U.S.
- The Ideal Special Operator/Group Break-Out/Group Discussion
- The Law Enforcement Special Operator Competency Model
- Personal Competency Review/Strengths and Weaknesses Identified

#### **Tuesday (The Role of Balanced Professional)**

- Ethics in Police Special Operations
- The Operator at Home: Strategies for Healthy Relationships (spouses attend)

- Cardiovascular fitness/nutrition
- Ethics Scenarios/Group Break-Out Discussion

#### Wednesday (The Role of Artful Warrior)

- Advanced Combat Firearms
- Advanced Dynamic Entry
- Techniques for Rapid/Effective Perimeter Deployment
- Techniques for Effective Intelligence Gathering

#### Monday (Month 2) (The Role of Selfless Achiever)

- Team Building Exercise
- Causes of Team Dysfunction
- Mentoring/Leadership
- Team Building Exercise

#### Tuesday (The Role of Combat Strategist)(Classroom Setting)

- Basic Mission Planning (non-stress)
- Developing Contingency Plans
- Mission Planning Exercise (stress)
- Problem Solving Exercise (stress)
- Team Problem Solving Exercise (non-stress)

#### Wednesday (Field Operations-Competency Integration)

- Team Obstacle Course/Team Rappelling
- Team Problem Solving Competition
- Team Firearms Drills/Competition
- Mission Planning Scenario (Focus on Leadership/Collaboration)
- Mission Execution (Focus on Flexible Decision-Making/Teamwork)
- Individual Competency Assessments/Personal Reflection

This developmental course is just an example of an intervention that addresses most, if not all, of the competencies identified in this research study. Other options for development include one or two-day seminars focused specifically on perceived competency gaps or weaknesses. Police organizations may choose to partner with universities or community colleges to integrate competencies into criminal justice programs already in place. Organizations desiring to design a curriculum for S.W.A.T.

officer development should utilize a systematic approach, such as Dubois' Strategic Systems Model.

### **Limitations and Research Suggestions**

This research study focused on the non-supervisory law enforcement special operator. While many police officers serving in various positions are experiencing the same trends and issues, this model should only be applied to S.W.A.T. operators practicing in the United States. The research results have implications for professional development only. Using the model for selection or promotion would require predictive validity not present in this study. This research could be used to create an instrument that assesses S.W.A.T. officer strengths and weaknesses. Operators could customize developmental plans that target their own needs. Finally, this research could be used as the foundation for further validation studies, which would allow for competency based selection processes.

There is some debate about the usefulness of competency models and integration of competencies into processes. Matlay (2001) conducted empirical research that suggested competency based training initiatives are "having little impact in addressing the training needs of the small business sector" (Garavan, 2001). Some experts find it difficult to believe that high performance can be broken down into clear components, and that applying competency frameworks to the selection process is effective (Townley, 1994). Holms (1995) suggests, "power relations that exist within the competency approach do not reflect developmental humanism, but instead everything developmental humanism is not" (Garavan, 2001). Much of the criticism regarding competency models revolves around the belief that competency based processes do not consider the dynamic characteristics of the human being. Many experts feel that users of competency-based



systems rarely consider how the varying personal characteristics of people will be considered when a competency approach is applied. Finally, many believe that competency models are not applicable across organizational boundaries, and competencies should be adjusted to account for contextual factors in order to be effective.

A final consideration for users of this research concerns the notion of high performance. During the interview with police psychologist Dr. Byron Greenberg, he noted that psychological research reveals five domains in which human characteristics can be classified. These are physical (PHY), psychological/emotional (PSY), cognitive mental (Cog), social/interpersonal (Soc), and spiritual (SPI). Dr. Greenberg then asserted that within each of these domains are “optimal characteristics” and “buffering characteristics.” With regard to buffering characteristics, Greenberg stated:

This is to say that if the person is cognitively limited (Cog) they should have high levels of Loyalty (Soc) and high levels of directibility versus being independent and valuing their own decisions above others (Soc). If they are not in prime physical health (Phy), they might compensate by having high levels of pain tolerance (Phy and Psy) and patience.

Greenberg asserts that high performance is not always a matter of officers being competent in all of the critical areas. He stated high performers often utilize strengths to “buffer” weaknesses. This research does not suggest that application of the competency model is the only method of creating higher performance. Model users and those planning development should consider this model as only a part of the overall developmental strategy.

Law enforcement special operators are constantly under pressure to conduct tactical missions in a manner that limits loss of life while achieving mission objectives.

Developing skills and behaviors is a critical responsibility of the tactical community. The

experts who participated in this research identified technical, personal, and social competencies that are possessed by high performing S.W.A.T. officers. Police S.W.A.T. teams should use this research, or conduct their own research, given the demands and the dynamic environment that our nation's tactical officers are expected to perform.

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## Appendix A-1

**Agencies Participating in the Focus Groups**

- 1. Hanover County Sheriff's Office**  
7522 County Complex Road  
Hanover, Virginia 23069  
(804) 365-6110
  
- 2. Chesterfield County Police Department**  
P.O. Box 148  
Chesterfield, Virginia 23832
  
- 3. City of Richmond Police Department**  
200 West Grace Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23220  
(804) 646-6842
  
- 4. Henrico County Division of Police**  
P.O. Box 27032  
Richmond, Virginia 23273  
(804) 501-4800

## Appendix A-2

**Competencies generated during the Focus Groups (exact words)**Competencies Master List

Ability to solve dynamic problems  
 Ability to adjust quickly to fluid situations  
 Stays abreast of new technologies, practices, training  
 Thorough/aware of alternatives and creates contingencies  
 Maintains and prepares equipment for rapid deployment  
 Willingness to learn/try new ideas  
 Pushes himself/herself for higher performance  
 Works well on a team  
 Self-motivated  
 Willingness to take charge when needed, regardless of rank or position

Ability to think quickly in ambiguous situations  
 Ability to act swiftly on decisions in a professional manner  
 Ability to motivate others to perform better  
 Ability to lead from the front  
 Higher than average work ethic  
 Constantly striving to improve weapons handling and accuracy  
 Does not use SWAT for personal gain or recognition

Has strength and cardiovascular fitness to perform at high levels  
 Ability to carry heavy loads  
 Ability to undertake intense physical exertion after long period of none  
 Keeps a stable personal life; doesn't make personal problems team problems  
 Able to assume various roles on the team, including leadership  
 Able to identify when to give input/direction and when to follow-orders  
 Able to make deadly force decisions swiftly and accurately  
 Able to master techniques related to perimeter deployment  
 Able to master techniques related to intelligence gathering  
 Able to master techniques related to dynamic entry  
 Trains with intensity  
 Able to use non-traditional approaches to resolving violence  
 Anticipates problems and prepares for them  
 Analyzes tactical/criminal trends and plans to address problems relating to them  
 Maintains high ethical behavior

Remains calm and controlled under periods of extreme stress  
 Able to endure extreme conditions (i.e. weather, physical/mental fatigue)  
 Able to perform self-critique  
 Able to receive criticism without becoming defensive  
 Desires to complete diverse training for different roles (sniper, grenadier, breacher)



Ability to use firearms at a high level  
 Ability to lead groups of SWAT members and police officers during training or tactical operations  
 Constantly sets new goals and completes them  
 Have self-confidence without using the SWAT label for personal gain or attention  
 Makes decisions without being afraid to fail  
 Ability to stay focused on tasks during training or field operations without getting distracted by other officers or small problems  
 Ability to self-motivate  
 Understands that the goal is high "team" performance and not individual success and takes steps (mentoring, self-critique) to manage this

Able to try new tactics and ideas  
 Constantly seeks individual and team improvement  
 Controls anxiety during stressful situations  
 Has thorough knowledge of weapons and use of them  
 Has thorough knowledge of tactics related to entries, perimeter, and planning  
 Maintains high personal integrity and behaviors away from the team

Ability to communicate thoughts clearly  
 Ability to stay focused on task/mission  
 Makes decisions quickly and correctly  
 Dedicated to SWAT duties beyond all other work duties  
 Ability to think ahead and anticipate needs/problems  
 Constantly considers effect on team when making decisions  
 Does not get consumed by SWAT at the cost of family/personal relationships

Puts team before self  
 Able to lead others  
 Leads by example  
 Demands perfection of himself  
 Stays focused on the mission  
 Ability to motivate team members  
 Ability to assert opinions and ideas  
 Ability to follow-orders and know when to remain passive

Ability to do whatever is needed to accomplish the mission  
 Physically fit  
 Mentally healthy  
 Ability to work individually or within the team  
 Ability to make quick and correct decisions under stress  
 Ability to adapt quickly to dynamic situations  
 Ability to think ahead and plan contingencies  
 Displays self-confidence and not arrogance  
 Able to act aggressively when needed, but control the aggression  
 Self-motivated

Competitive  
 Self-motivated  
 Able to adapt to different environments  
 Puts the team first  
 Open to new ideas  
 Able to receive criticism  
 Able to set goals and stay focused to meet them  
 Able to recognize opportunities or threats in the environment  
 Physically fit  
 Mentally fit

Self-motivated  
 Cardiovascular fitness  
 Physical strength  
 Perceives all aspects of the surrounding  
 Ability to efficiently manage time and equipment  
 Able to create high performance with few resources  
 Able to think critically and to make decisions regarding threat response  
 Puts team goals in front of personal goals  
 Able to make decisions under stress  
 Able to multi-task  
 Is well rounded and uses non-police knowledge to create responses

Adapts quickly to evolving situations  
 Ability to see "big picture" when making decisions  
 Self-motivated  
 Ability to follow orders  
 Puts team goals ahead of individual goals  
 Maintains high ethical and moral behaviors

Stays calm under pressure  
 Able to make rapid, intelligent decisions at a moments notice  
 Internal drive to succeed  
 Ability to process a large amount of information while coordinating threat response  
 Desire to be pushed to physical/mental limits  
 Able to turn stress into a positive driving force  
 Desire to use abilities to contribute to team goals  
 Leads non-SWAT officers during tactical encounters  
 Ability to follow orders

Desire and ability to learn new concepts  
 Understands role in team environment  
 Displays moral and ethical behaviors  
 Follows instructions without hesitation  
 Physically fit  
 Ability to process environmental stimuli and make effective decisions

Adapts to unforeseen challenges  
 Ability to thrive in a stressful environment  
 Self directed and self motivated  
 Ability to challenge yourself when no one else is looking  
 Ability to retain what is learned during training and missions  
 Open to training and criticism  
 Able to take charge and lead other team members or officers  
 Must be empathetic to citizens/suspects/families they encounter  
 Possesses high morals and ethics  
 Puts team goals before personal goals  
 Desires to learn different roles (sniper, breacher, entry, grenadier)  
 Possesses large amount of tactical knowledge  
 Possesses higher than average legal knowledge  
 Performs at high level with firearms and combat tactics  
 Physically fit

Recognize and react appropriately to threats  
 Ability to organize and plan under stress  
 High degree of physical endurance  
 Ability to stay focused during times of fatigue or stress  
 High proficiency with various firearms  
 Self-motivated to excel physically and tactically  
 Able to provide constructive criticism while mentoring  
 Able to inspire confidence on other members by providing feedback

Self-motivated  
 Maintains physical health  
 Able to recognize and fix mechanical problems  
 Able to follow orders  
 Able to stay mission oriented  
 Able to communicate clearly under stress  
 Able to work under stress  
 Teaches and mentors new officers or underperformers  
 Adapts to any environment  
 Able to multi-task (shoot/move/, talk/plan, listen/write)  
 Puts team goals before individual goals

Looks for new challenges  
 Motivated to perform beyond minimum standards  
 Leads other SWAT officers and non-SWAT officers during operations  
 Volunteer for unusual or extraordinary assignments  
 Able to work closely with other team members  
 Able to relax and have fun when appropriate  
 Train until tasks are performed perfectly  
 Driven to achieve mission success  
 Communicate ideas in a manner that inspires others

Can operate without specific rules or procedures when none exist  
 Shows high level of patience  
 Seeks excellent physical fitness  
 Shows strong communication abilities.

Is dependable during training and missions (will do what is needed without complaining)  
 Willing to adapt to change  
 Can work without a plan  
 Performs above average with firearms  
 Volunteers for extra duties Maintains equipment at a high ready  
 Can cope with traumatic events (death, violence)

Passion/Heart/Desire beyond just being present  
 Ability to learn from mistakes  
 Has an ethical private life  
 Retains learning from training and operations  
 Receives criticism well  
 Able to visualize tasks and use that to create higher performance  
 Able to retain individual character traits, while learning role on the team

Self-motivated  
 Motivates others  
 Leads others when needed  
 Has advanced technical capabilities with equipment (firearms, shield, ram)  
 Makes personal sacrifices to benefit the team  
 Helps with all aspects of team performance, not just “fun” stuff.  
 Treats other officers with respect  
 Perform their job away from team with skill and professionalism  
 Deals with pressure or unexpected changes with flexibility  
 Is always a positive representative of the team  
 Displays self-confidence and positive outlook

Maintains moral behaviors away from work  
 Maintains good attitude and does not allow personal problems to interfere with the team  
 Develops younger team members as a mentor  
 Sets example by performing all tasks they expect younger officers to perform  
 Not afraid to make mistakes  
 Creates learning from mistakes or problems  
 Understands role on team and works to create unity  
 Does not conform to what a “SWAT guy” should be. Maintains individualism while acting as a team member.

Ability to remain calm under pressure  
 Ability to think and react during high pressure  
 Puts team needs before his own  
 Ability to formulate several solutions to a single problem

Can work independently or within a team with little guidance  
Passion to constantly improve self and team  
Understands importance of mission regardless of fear  
Maintains a positive attitude  
Willing to take risks to achieve mission success  
Always does more than expected  
Is trustworthy  
Desires and is able to learn by listening  
Constantly assesses his environment through a tactical filter  
Teaches officers (SWAT or non-SWAT) constructively  
Displays confidence and not arrogance

**END**

## Appendix A-3

**Highest and Lowest Rated Competencies****Highest Rated Competencies**

1.	Able to solve problems under stress	4.97
2.	Able to make deadly force decisions swiftly and accurately	4.97
3.	Reacts quickly during evolving situations	4.90
4.	Remains calm and controlled under periods of stress	4.87
5.	Able to make swift/intelligent decisions at a moments notice	4.87
6.	Puts team success before individual success	4.81
7.	Able to lead non-S.W.A.T. officers during tactical situations	4.81
8.	Is not afraid to make mistakes	4.81

**Lowest Rated Competencies**

1.	Able to recognize and fix mechanical problems	3.23
2.	Dedicated to S.W.A.T above all other duties	3.61
3.	Possesses a large amount of legal knowledge	3.81
4.	Uses non-police knowledge to add value to the team	3.83
5.	Has a high level of physical strength	3.84
6.	Is fearless in the face of danger	3.87
7.	Volunteers for extra unusual assignments to benefit the team	3.93
8.	Stays abreast of new technologies	3.97
9.	Is empathetic and respectful to victims	3.97

## Appendix A-4

### Competency Adjustments Based on Survey and Interviews

- The competency “Able to demonstrate basic tactics for new officers” was changed to “Mentors new officers” based on interview feedback.
- The competency “Uses abilities to contribute to team goals” was absorbed into other competencies such as “Does whatever it takes to accomplish the mission” and “Considers the impact of individual decisions on the team.” This was done because of expert interview feedback and to eliminate redundancy.
- The competency “Treats other officers with respect, whether S.W.A.T. or not”, was absorbed into the competency “Is a positive ambassador for the team”. This was done to eliminate redundancy and after consideration of expert interview feedback.
- The competency “Always does more than expected” was eliminated because it was considered ambiguous. After the expert interviews it was absorbed into the competency “Is self-motivated” and “Constantly seeks higher performance.”
- After preliminary clustering, the competency “Is decisive and not afraid to fail” was absorbed into “Able to make swift/intelligent decisions at a moments notice” and “Is not afraid to fail, but does not fail often.” The original competency was determined to have dual meaning, which made it confusing.
- The competency “Desires to conduct divers/advanced training” was absorbed into “Open to new ideas and advanced training” to eliminate redundancy.
- The competency “Is willing to do whatever is needed to accomplish the mission” was absorbed into “Is dependable during training and missions” after consideration of expert feedback.
- The competency “Is able to effectively multi-task” was changed to “Is able to effectively perform multiple tasks under stress”, and the competency “Is able to process large amounts of information under stress” was removed after consideration of expert interviews and redundancy concerns.
- The competency “Does not get consumed by the team at the cost of personal relationships” was combined with “Maintains stability in his/her personal life” to create a single competency of “Maintains a stable and healthy personal life.” This was done after considering feedback from expert interviews.
- The competency “Is able to assume various roles on the team” was absorbed into “Constantly seeks higher performance” and “Open to new ideas and training”

because of the low survey score (4.03), redundancy, and because of lack of expert feedback.

- The competency “Knows when to give input and when to remain passive” (4.0) was absorbed by “Able to follow orders” and “Able to take charge when needed regardless of rank” because of the low survey score, and because of redundancy. The same was done for “Asserts opinions and ideas when appropriate.” (4.13)
- The competency “Analyzes trends and develops strategies to address them” (4.17) was assimilated with “Anticipates problems and develops contingencies” and “Sees the big picture when making decisions.” None of the experts noted this as critical or even important during the interviews.
- The competency “Quickly learns new tactics and weapons” (4.20) was removed due to the overlapping meaning with competencies related to tactical expertise with perimeter deployment, firearms, and dynamic entry.
- The competency “Identifies personal psychological issues and addresses them (4.16) was absorbed into “Maintains a healthy and stable personal life” in the interest of keeping the model lean and usable. Some of the experts believed that asking tactical officers to identify their own psychological issues might not be realistic.
- The competency “Uses competitive spirit to challenge self and others” (4.13) was absorbed into “Trains with Intensity” due to its low score and expert feedback.
- The competency “Able to effectively manage equipment” (4.16) was removed due to its redundancy with “Maintains and Prepares Equipment for Rapid Deployment.”
- The competency “Provides constructive feedback during mentoring” (4.17) was absorbed into “Mentors new officers”, as the latter was felt to capture all aspect of good mentoring.
- The competency “Knows when to relax and have fun” (4.16) was absorbed into “Maintains a stable and healthy personal life.” This was based on expert feedback.
- The competency “Communicates in a manner that inspires others” (4.13) was assimilated into “Is able to motivate and inspire others” to eliminate redundancy.
- The competency “Makes personal sacrifices to benefit the team” (4.16) was combined with “Maintains a stable and healthy personal life”, but the spirit of personal sacrifice is still maintained in the model.



- The competency “Does not abandon own personal uniqueness to fit with the team” (4.0) was eliminated due to its unclear meaning and no mention of related competencies by the experts during interviews.
- The competency “Constantly assesses the environment through a tactical filter” (4.07) was eliminated because of its unclear meaning, and because competencies relating to contingency planning and developing solutions will capture its spirit.
- The competency “Able to make swift/intelligent decisions at a moments notice” (4.87) was combined with “Reacts swiftly during dynamic situations” (4.90) to eliminate redundancy.
- The competency of “Exercises regularly to maintain fitness” (4.62) was assimilated into the competency “Maintains a high level of cardiovascular/physical endurance” (4.23) to reduce redundancy.
- The competency “Able to conduct self-critique” was combined with “Able to receive criticism” to form the competency “Able to conduct self-critique and receive criticism.”
- The competency “Stays abreast of new training techniques” was combined with “Open to new ideas and advanced training” to form the competency “Open to new ideas and training techniques.” This was done to eliminate redundancy and because expert interview feedback did not suggest the need for two separate competencies.
- The competency “Copes well after traumatic events” (4.48) was absorbed into “Maintains a stable and healthy personal life” (4.32) based on feedback from interview subjects.

## Appendix A-5

**Interview Summaries****1. Dell P. Hackett**

**President – Law Enforcement Wellness Association**

**[www.cophealth.com](http://www.cophealth.com)**

**Office: (541) 935-2594**

Dell Hackett retired from the Lane County Sheriff's Office in Eugene, Oregon after 28 years of law enforcement service. Lt. Hackett has managed numerous special operations units, and he served eight years with his agency's SWAT Team as an operator and Commander. He is a diplomat member of the American Board of Law Enforcement Experts, and he is currently President of the Law Enforcement Wellness Association.

**Interview Summary:** Hackett began by agreeing with the survey results on the matter of physical fitness. Hackett, who is a certified Law Enforcement Fitness Specialist and Personal Trainer, stated that "dynamic strength" is not critical to SWAT operator high performance. He stated that regular exercise, cardiovascular fitness, and flexibility are highly important. Hackett also stressed that SWAT operators are more likely to be high performing if they have supportive family members. He concluded the interview by providing me with a short list of five essential attributes of high performing SWAT operators. They are:

- (1) Dedication to police work and service

- (2) Belief in physical fitness
- (3) Constantly seeking improvement
- (4) Advanced abilities with regard to weapons handling and other tactics
- (5) Able to excel within a high performing team

## **2. Corporal Patrick Reilly**

**Wellness Coordinator**

**Orange County Sheriff's Office**

**Orlando, Florida**

**[pat.reilly@ocfl.net](mailto:pat.reilly@ocfl.net)**

**Office: (407) 254-7191**

Corporal Reilly is a twenty year veteran of police work and has been the Wellness Coordinator for the Orange County Sheriff's Office for six years. He has been an operator on their SWAT Team for twelve years. Corporal Reilly is an endurance athlete who has competed in numerous high-profile endurance races, including four Ironman triathlons and 24 marathons.

**Interview Summary:** Corporal Reilly stressed that high performing operators are reliable and credible. He stated good operators were good police officers first, and they display behaviors that reflect good decision-making. He also stated that good operators are not afraid to fail. They are willing to make mistakes and then learn from them. Corporal Reilly also stated that high performing operators demonstrate

leadership within their organization. With regard to physical fitness, Corporal Reilly that physical strength is not critical to high performance. He believes that good SWAT operators have an active lifestyle and get plenty of rest.

### **3. Major Steve Ijames**

**Springfield Police Department**

**Springfield, Missouri**

**[lesslethal@aol.com](mailto:lesslethal@aol.com)**

**Office: (417) 838-6804**

Major Ijames has been a police officer for 28 years and is currently a Major in charge of Criminal Investigations. Ijames has a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration and a Master's Degree in Public Administration. He has served in a variety of assignments including uniformed patrol, investigations, undercover narcotics, and SWAT. Major Ijames has developed several training programs for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA). He has provided training for agencies in 31 foreign countries including Tanzania, Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, El Salvador, and Yemen. Major Ijames helped to develop his agency's SWAT Team and served as the first Team Leader from 1989-1992. He then served as Team Commander from 1992-1995. He remained active in SWAT leadership after his promotion to Captain in 1995.

**Interview Summary:** Major Ijames provided a brief, but poignant, response to the question about SWAT high performance. He offered that high performing operators possess courage under fire. He believes that the ability to deliver force swiftly and properly under dynamic circumstances is essential to high performance. Major Ijames also stressed the importance of trust. He stated that good operators trust the SWAT officers around them to do their jobs, and he understands that those same officers have put their trust in him. Finally, Major Ijames believes that the word “advanced” (in relation to high performance) simply means that the officer has mastered basic skills and tactics.

#### **4. Retired Chief Michael Foreman**

**Orange County Sheriff’s Office**

**Orlando, Florida**

**[mforeman@dhbt.com](mailto:mforeman@dhbt.com)**

**Office: (800) 413-5155**

Retired Chief Foreman left the Orange County Sheriff’s Office in 2004. He served for years as a law enforcement officer, and eighteen of those years he served on the Orange County Sheriff’s SWAT Team. Chief Foreman served as the team commander for eight years. He is currently the Senior Vice-President for Domestic and International Sales at DHB Armor Group, and he also serves as a Director with the National Tactical Officer’s Association (NTOA).

**Interview Summary:** Retired Chief Foreman began by stating that you cannot be a high performing SWAT officer unless you understand your team's objectives and overall mission. He added that high performers are committed and dedicated to accomplishing the team objectives. Foreman added that good tactical officers were good police officers first. They are confident, and the confidence is revealed during their clear professional communication. He added that high performers must have the highest levels of firearms proficiency and be willing to learn new tactics and test new equipment. According to Foreman, the best tactical operators constantly seek higher performance by training to improve weaknesses. Regarding physical fitness, he feels that strength is often overrated and cardiovascular conditioning and endurance are of critical importance. He went on to say that good tactical operators don't move so fast that they miss opportunities or threats during operations. They are able to utilize controlled aggression and think critically. Foreman stated that maintaining a healthy lifestyle away from work "cannot be underrated", and that stress management and personal stability are usually present among the highest performers. Finally, Retired Chief Foreman asserted that, because of all the above mentioned traits, the high performers are ambassadors for the SWAT Team, and they "market the tactical program" to the rest of the organization.

## **5. Sergeant Eduardo Jany**

**Monroe Police Department**

**Washington State**

**[mpdk912@aol.com](mailto:mpdk912@aol.com)**

**Office: (54-293) 248-9745**

Eduardo Jany is a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Marine Corps Reserve presently serving in Latin America. He has over 25 years of combined active and reserve service in the Marines and U.S. Army with extensive experience in Special Operations. Eduardo is a Sergeant with the Monroe Police Department in Washington State, and he has over eighteen years of law enforcement experience. He holds certifications and instructor credentials relating to SWAT, K-9, Narcotics, Physical Fitness, and many more fields. Eduardo is the recipient of numerous awards including the Bronze Star, Police Officer of the Year “Excellence in Service Award”, and the Police Medal of Valor.

**Interview Summary:** Sergeant Jany provided interview feedback via e-mail, because he is currently deployed with a group of Marines in Argentina. The focus of Sergeant Jany’s message was “balance”. He stressed that being able to shoot, move, and fight is not the end of SWAT officer performance. Communicating plans, ideas, or commands during training or under stress is the mark of a good tactical operator. Jany believes that stressing the operators mentally is important as stressing them physically. He suggests requiring operators to perform public speaking, or requiring them to articulate tactical plans to the team will allow them to develop communication skills. Furthermore, Jany stated that good operators will be able to adjust the mission based on sudden changes in the environment or situation. Jany believes that good SWAT officers have built a reputation as exceptional police officers in general. Finally, Jany

Jany stated that good SWAT operators are able to operate effectively in boring or dynamic environments.

## 6. Lt. Michael Zahr

**City of Modesto Police Department**

**Modesto, California**

**[zahrm@modestopd.com](mailto:zahrm@modestopd.com)**

**Office: (209) 558-6300**

Lieutenant Michael Zahr has over 26 years of police experience. He has served on the City of Modesto SWAT Team for 19 years, and he is currently the team commander.

Lt. Zahr is currently the Commander of the Drug Unit.

**Interview Summary:** Lt. Zahr began his interview by discussing physical fitness. He believes, like many others, that high performing SWAT officers have a healthy lifestyle and what he calls a “fitness balance”. He went on to say that cardiovascular fitness and endurance were more important than physical strength. He then discussed the importance of maturity. He feels that officers who have demonstrated sound decision-making during routine and stressful police operations make the best SWAT officers. Another aspect of maturity, according to Zahr is demonstrated, when SWAT officers use clear and professional communication with teammates during missions. Zahr described another competency, which he called “the ability to demonstrate controlled aggression.” In Zahr’s experience, high performing SWAT officers are



aggressive, and they are experts at completing missions without violating law or using excessive force. Zahr then began discussing leadership. He feels that leadership ability is innate in good tactical officers, and high performing officers are usually leaders within the organization. They demonstrate initiative and selflessness by volunteering for duties that many would consider too difficult or mundane. Zahr concluded by stating that good SWAT officers usually maintain healthy personal lives. This is not to say that tactical officers always have perfect marriages or they are always great parents, but high performers are able to recognize opportunities for personal growth and then act before the personal problem has a negative impact on the officer and the team.

## **7. Lieutenant David Bower**

**Michigan State Police**

**[bowerd@michigan.gov](mailto:bowerd@michigan.gov)**

**Office: (517) 335-9417**

Lieutenant David Bower has 20 years of police experience, nineteen of them have in service with the Michigan State Police. He has served for 17 years on the Emergency Support Team, and he is currently the team commander. Lt. Bower has extensive training in Law Enforcement Physical Fitness and Wellness.

**Interview Summary:** Lt. Bower began by talking about high performance under stress. His experience has shown that the most capable tactical officers have

demonstrated a history of good decision-making before they were selected for the Emergency Support Team (EST). The decision-making skill is not limited to decisions during tactical situations. Bower believes that decisions about report writing, personal interactions, communication, and use of force can be very telling with regard to how the officer will make decisions during violent incidents. He added that good tactical officers are always posing the question “What if...?” to themselves. The allows for processing of information through a “tactical filter” and creates readiness. Bower went on to say that good tactical officers are driven by a desire to serve and not a desire to feed their egos. He then stressed the importance of honesty. According to Bower, honesty builds trust and trust is the key building block of high performance. Bower went on to say that high performing tactical officers are great teammates, and great teammates are loyal and committed. Lt. Bower considers physical fitness important, and he stressed the importance of cardiovascular conditioning. He agreed with the findings about physical fitness from the survey. Finally, Lt. Bower used the word “balance” to describe how high performing SWAT officers manage stress effectively. He feels tactical officers manage stress in a manner that doesn’t dramatically change performance at work.

## **8. Jocelyn Roland, Ph.D.**

**Psychologist**

**[jeroland@att.net](mailto:jeroland@att.net)**

**Office: (703) 836-6767**

Jocelyn Roland Ph.D. is an experienced psychologist with a history of service to police agencies in southern California. She was educated at Trinity College and the California School of Professional Psychology. She has worked extensively with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) Special Enforcement Bureau. She has experience with hostage negotiations, SWAT officer selection, SWAT training, and police suicide counseling. She is currently in private practice providing psychological services and consultation for public safety and private industry. Dr. Roland is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police Psychological Services Section.

**Interview Summary:** Dr. Roland began by describing SWAT high performers as “balanced”. She stressed that in her experience the most successful tactical officers are those who have commitment in other places besides the SWAT Team and work, such as personal relationships or hobbies. She stated high performers take the time to be a “whole person.” Dr. Roland went on to say that successful operators were high performing police officers before they were selected to be tactical officers. They are clear thinkers and they demonstrate “cognitive flexibility.” According to Dr. Roland, good tactical operators often have the ability to delay gratification. These officers don't allow physical impulse to drive all decisions. An ability to follow rules and tactical procedures is also important, and Dr. Roland added that high performers can operate independently or within a team. Dr. Roland stated that successful SWAT officers display personal commitment in all aspects of their lives, and they also display humility whether at work or home. Finally, Dr. Roland expressed that high

performers see mistakes as opportunities to learn.

## **9. Eugene Deisinger, Ph.D.**

**Commander, Special Operations Unit**

**Iowa State University Police**

**[erdeisin@iastate.edu](mailto:erdeisin@iastate.edu)**

**Office: (515) 294-4529**

Gene Deisinger, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in counseling psychology from Iowa State University. He is a licensed psychologist, a certified health service provider, and a certified peace officer. He is currently Commander of the Special Operations Unit of the Iowa State University Police Division. He provides leadership for a range of functional responsibilities including criminal investigations, threat assessment and management, dignitary protection, crisis intervention, internal affairs, public information, community outreach, and crime prevention. Dr. Deisinger specializes in the provision of psychological services in support of law enforcement. He conducts a full range of evaluation for law enforcement professionals including pre-employment selection, promotional/leadership, special duty and fitness for duty evaluation, critical incident stress management, and management of situations involving potential violence. Dr. Deisinger has provided support to university, municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

**Interview Summary:** Dr. Deisinger divided his response into six different sections.

They are:

- (1) Absence of psychopathology
- (2) Capacity for Regulated Aggression/Command Presence
- (3) Stress Tolerance/Adaptivity/Resilience
- (4) Decision-Making Ability/Conscientiousness
- (5) Leadership Ability/Response to Command
- (6) Team Work/Interpersonal skills/Communication

Like many police psychologists, Dr. Deisinger uses psychological assessment tools to screen SWAT officers for psychopathology. In terms of competencies, Dr. Deisinger began his discussion by stating that SWAT officers possess a high propensity for unregulated aggression, at a high level, under stress. He went on to say that good SWAT officers have a high tolerance for stress, and they possess “resiliency.” He defined resiliency as the ability to overcome or work in spite of obstacles. According to Dr.

Deisinger, patience is an aspect of resiliency that is an important competency. Dr. Deisinger defined “critical decision-making ability” as the ability to make rapid and effective decisions under stress. With regard to teamwork and interpersonal skills, Dr. Deisinger believes that high performing SWAT officers are assertive, direct, clear, and honest with their communications. In addition, high performers are dependable, which Dr. Deisinger defined as being “willing to perform any task necessary to accomplish the mission. He concluded by stating “conscientiousness” is a quality that high performers possess, and competencies relating to this quality are

critical. He also pointed out that conscientiousness is a trait that has been highly correlated to successful employment outcomes, reliability, and integrity.

**10. Scott Allen, Ph.D.**

**Senior Staff Psychologist**

**Miami-Dade Police**

**[sallen@mdpd.com](mailto:sallen@mdpd.com)**

**Office: (305) 591-1106**

Dr. Scott Allen is the Senior Staff Psychologist with the Miami-Dade Police Department. He supervises the negotiators and is a consultant to the Tactical Operations Center (TOC). Dr. Allen has participated in more than 1,100 call-outs during 24 years of service, and he currently serves as the Chairman of the Police and Public Safety Section of the American Psychological Association-Division 18.

**Interview Summary:** Dr. Allen began his discussion of high performance by stating that good SWAT officers have a positive self-image and self-confidence. He stated that good SWAT officers persist and overcome obstacles during training and missions. He went on to describe high performers as decisive during times of stress. Self-control during violent encounters and other dynamic events is also a trait possessed by high performers according to Dr. Allen. He added “resilience” to his list of high performance attributes, and he feels that good tactical operators stay focused on mission success and are willing to perform and task necessary to accomplish the mission. In conclusion, Dr. Allen

believes that high performers possess a higher than average amount of empathy.

Empathy allows the operator to understand the situation from the view of the suspect/s, and this may create more efficient tactical responses and an increased ability to negotiate should the situation require.

## **11. Byron Greenberg, Ph.D., MPH**

**Police Psychologist**

**Greenberg & Associates**

**greenberg.dr@att.net**

**Office: (804) 520-6868**

Dr. Byron Greenberg is a licensed clinical psychologist who provides services in South Central Virginia. He consults with numerous law enforcement agencies and provides support in areas such as employee placement, advancement, and special duty selection.

Dr. Greenberg has more than 12 years of experience providing psychological services to law enforcement organizations in Virginia and Southern California.

**Interview Summary:** Dr. Greenberg began his response by providing information relating to psychological research. He provided the following categories of what he called “cognitive and physiological characteristics”. They included:

- Physical (PHY)
- Psychological/Emotional (PSY)
- Cognitive/Mental (Cog)

- Social/Interpersonal (Soc)
- Spiritual (SPI)

He added that each of these areas contain “optimal characteristics” and “buffering characteristics”. Regarding buffering characteristics, Dr. Greenberg stated:

This is to say that if the person is cognitively limited (Cog) they should have high levels of loyalty (Soc) and have high levels of directibility versus being independent and valuing their own decisions above others (Soc). If they are not in prime physical health (Phy), they might compensate by having high levels of pain tolerance (Phy and Psy) and patience (Psy).

Aside from the research, Dr. Greenberg made some less formal observations about SWAT high performance. He began by stating that good SWAT officers thrive in environments that are “excited”. He added that these officers are able to control aggression and other behaviors when their surroundings are seemingly out of control. According to Greenberg, good SWAT officers think tactically, and he compared them to chess players. He also stated that high performers have “strong ego needs”, and a hunger for “esprit de corps”. Finally, Greenberg pointed out there is no one personality type associated with SWAT high performance, but SWAT officers with different personalities usually share many of the same competencies.

## **12. Gary Kaufman, Psy.D.**

**Michigan State Police (Retired)**

**[mspdoc1@bellsouth.net](mailto:mspdoc1@bellsouth.net)**

**Office: (843) 991-1166**



Dr. Gary Kaufman is on private practice in Charleston, S.C. after retiring from the Michigan State Police after 22 years of service. During the majority of that time he served as the Chief Police Psychologist and Director of the Behavioral Science Unit. He personally responded to over 400 SWAT activations and is an advocate of competency-based research of SWAT operator performance.

**Interview Summary:** Dr. Kaufman began his response by stating his belief that the selection of SWAT officers should be rooted in competencies and not clinical evaluation. He stated his belief that competency-based research is needed in the law enforcement profession. Dr. Kaufman discussed high performance by asserting that high performing tactical officers often have the ability to visualize tactics and mission needs prior to actually performing them. He described high performing operators as “method oriented”, and he stated that good SWAT officers often take an active role in planning training and missions. Dr. Kaufman also describes high performers as people who can think independently and who are sensitive to those around them. He added that good tactical officers possess good interpersonal communication skills, loyalty, and ethical behaviors. Regarding physical fitness, Dr. Kaufman believes that it is not the officer’s physical fitness level that is critical, but it is the act of practicing physical activity that builds confidence, acceptance, and teamwork. He went on to say that high performers have a history of success on teams, and they display supportive behaviors towards teammates. Dr. Kaufman concluded his comments by stating that good SWAT operators control emotions during times of stress.

### **13. Major Doug Phillips**

**Polk County Sheriff's Office**

**Des Moines, Iowa**

**[dphilli@co.polk.ia.us](mailto:dphilli@co.polk.ia.us)**

**Office: (515) 248-6062**

Major Doug Phillips has over thirty years of law enforcement experience and eighteen years of experience in police special operations. He currently serves as the Commander of the Metro Special Tactics and Response team, which is a multi-agency task force and full-time SWAT Team with 65 officers.

**Interview Summary:** Major Phillips divided his response into four sections. First he discussed decision-making. He believes that high performing SWAT operators are aggressive in their decision-making. He stated that good tactical officers react quickly during dynamic situations. Second, he offered his belief that high performers possess high initiative and motivation. He clarified this by stating that good operators “step up and take on difficult tasks or assignments” when necessary to accomplish the mission or complete training. He added that high performers are willing to operate in “gray areas” when boundaries may not be clear and plans cannot be certain. Next, Major Phillips discussed physical fitness and described fitness as “imperative”. He spoke specifically about cardiovascular endurance and stamina, and he stated that physical strength is not critical to high performance. Finally, Major Phillips asserted that good tactical officers maintain a life “balance”. He stated high performers strive to maintain healthy personal

relationships and control stress. This can be seen in how their behaviors reflect their egos. He added that good operators have good perspective about how the SWAT Team fits into their lives professionally and personally.

#### **14. Assistant Chief of Police Steven R. Wyatt**

**Commander, Uniform Division**

**Ogden City Police Department (Ogden, Utah)**

**[splopsmi@hotmail.com](mailto:splopsmi@hotmail.com)**

**(currently deployed to Sadr City, Iraq)**

Assistant Chief Wyatt has more than 24 years of law enforcement experience. He has served in many areas including patrol operations, major crimes, and special weapons and tactics. He served on his agency's SWAT Team for 15 years as a member and element leader, and he is currently the Assistant Chief, Commander of the Uniform Division. From January 1998 to September 2000 Assistant Chief Wyatt served as the Commander of the Ogden/Metro SWAT Team. Assistant Chief Wyatt is currently deployed to Sadr City, Iraq, where he is a Major with the Utah Army National Guard. He has served with the Army National Guard for 22 years, and he is currently the Deputy Commander, 19<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (Airborne). Assistant Chief Wyatt has received numerous awards for Valor, Merit, and Distinguished Service from the Army and the Ogden City Police. He is an adjunct faculty member with the International Association of Chiefs of Police and an Advisory Panel Member for the National Tactical Officer's Association.

**Interview Summary:** Assistant Chief Wyatt, like several other experts, provided a list of competencies and behaviors that he feels are essential to SWAT high performance. He believes you cannot be a high performing SWAT officer unless you:

- (1) are in top physical condition, emphasizing aerobic conditioning at a high level (2 mile run in under 15 minutes) as well as muscular conditioning and a body fat level of 16% or below;
- (2) are capable of conducting extended operations while wearing the required equipment, in whatever environmental or terrain conditions exist;
- (3) are willing to invest personal time and money, when necessary, in gaining and maintaining high levels of skill with assigned weapons, equipment, and tactics;
- (4) are a highly motivated individual with strong commitment to excellence and great self-discipline;
- (5) are a light drinker and non-smoker;
- (6) have the respect of your peers and supervisors;
- (7) and are well read.

He believes that competencies that drive performance in the above areas are the most critical.

## **15. Commander Charles “Sid” Heal**

**Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department**

**[CShel@lasd.org](mailto:CShel@lasd.org)**

**Office: (323) 526-5466**

Charles “Sid” Heal is a Commander with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department and has been in law enforcement for more than 31 years, nearly half of which has been spent in units charged with handling law enforcement special and emergency operations. During his career he has served as an operations officer, watch commander, unit commander, incident commander, consultant, and trainer. He is a court-recognized expert in law enforcement special operations and emergency management. Sid has earned three college degrees, and he is the author of *Sound Doctrine: A Tactical Primer* and an *Illustrated Guide to Tactical Diagramming*, as well as more than 100 articles on various law enforcement issues. Sid recently retired from the Marine Corp after 35 years, with service in more than 20 countries and four combat tours.

**Interview Summary:** Commander Heal provided feedback that revolved around a central theme, which he stated was “a sharp mind is the warrior’s edge”, and most of his answers were grounded in his belief that the best SWAT officers make great decisions and apply the science of tactics during operations. He started his answer by stating that good tactical officers understand that special operations are a craft to be learned. He asserts that the most formidable warriors are students of their professions, and the biggest failures during tactical operations are attributed to lapses in judgment. Commander Heal feels that physical conditioning and weapons proficiency are critical to high performance, but that they “pale in comparison with the catastrophic effects resulting from poor judgment”. He stated the best operators seek to understand how environmental factors influence decision-making during tactical encounters. These operators then develop the

ability to use these factors as an advantage or as a way of completing the mission more effectively. He concludes by stating:

It is time to recognize that the art of war is really an application of the science. To do less is too horrible to contemplate in a profession that chastens failures with death.

## **16. Captain Christopher S. Alberta**

**Henrico Division of Police (Virginia)**

**[alb52@co.henrico.va.us](mailto:alb52@co.henrico.va.us)**

**Office: (804) 501-4832**

Captain Chris Alberta is a 32-year veteran of the Henrico Division of Police, which has approximately 550 officers and is located in the Richmond, Virginia metro area. For 20 years Captain Alberta was a member of the SWAT team, spending 14 of those years as the Commander. He has provided instruction for the National Rifle Association, the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, and the Virginia Tactical Association. Captain Alberta is a graduate of the F.B.I. National Academy, and he currently serves as the Commander of the Community Policing Section.

**Interview Summary:** Captain Alberta began his discussion by noting that high performing tactical officers are totally committed, and they are focused on the SWAT Team's objectives and mission. His experience has proven that good tactical officers are self-motivated and driven to excel beyond minimum standards. Captain Alberta asserted that good SWAT officers are conceptual thinkers and very often "see the future" when planning and executing missions. According to the former SWAT Commander, good

tactical officers adapt quickly to changes in mission dynamics. They are able to accept defeat and learn from mistakes. They are not afraid to fail, but they do not fail often. The Captain stated high performers are often methodical planners, but they are also able to work under undefined guidelines or when thorough planning is not possible. He added that good tactical officers understand when to assert ideas and when to follow orders. Also, high performers will assume the role of mentor without being asked to do so. Captain Alberta agrees with the other experts on the nature of SWAT physical fitness and emphasized cardiovascular conditioning and endurance. He concluded his response by stating he would choose “head and heart over muscle every time”.

#### **17. Lt. Ken Hubbs**

**City of San Diego Police Department**

**Commander-Sand Diego Police SWAT**

**[khubbs@cox.net](mailto:khubbs@cox.net)**

**Office: (619) 876-9645**

Lieutenant Ken Hubbs has been the Commander of the Sand Diego Police SWAT team for 13 years. He also serves as the President of the California Association of Tactical Officers. Lieutenant Hubbs has over 27 years of law enforcement experience.

**Interview Summary:** Lt. Hubbs believes the best SWAT operators are “quietly competent”. He feels that high performers are “team oriented” and are driven to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects positively on the team. According to Lt. Hubbs,

good tactical officers are “self-motivated” and need very little supervision. He asserts that high performers possess a “strong desire to improve” and are “constantly looking for better ways to do business”. Lt. Hubbs went on to say that the highest performers are “tactically intelligent, “tactically creative”, and “open-minded”. He stressed that physical fitness was important, but not as important as competencies related to critical thinking and flexibility in mission planning and execution. Lt. Hubbs believes that the most capable operators are “professional in action and speech” and possess excellent communication ability.

#### **18. Senior Agent Don Kraemer**

**Lakewood Police Department (Colorado)**

**[dbkraemer@prodigy.net](mailto:dbkraemer@prodigy.net)**

**Office: (303) 987-7146**

Senior Agent Don Kraemer has over 30 years of law enforcement experience and has been a SWAT operator since 1984. He has served in various positions with his agency and has served as a team leader with the Lakewood Police SWAT team. He is the current President of the Rocky Mountain Tactical Team Association.

**Interview Summary:** Senior Agent Kraemer started by asserting that high performing SWAT officers can “think on their feet during rapidly changing situations”. He noted that the best tactical officers can operate effectively when detailed plans are absent. He believes that tactical officers must possess the physical strength necessary to be a good



police officer, but mental fitness for SWAT officers is critical. Kraemer stated that the best operators can “push their mental limits”. In his experience, high performing operators show initiative by generating ideas, encouraging thought, and communicating clearly. He believes that good SWAT officers display leadership within the organization during normal police operations. Kraemer noted that good SWAT officers are often the best critical thinkers in the organization. He concluded his response by stating that high performers find time for relationship maintenance and hobbies away from work in order to achieve balance in their lives.

**19. Lt. Mark Christian**

**Special Operations Unit Director**

**San Antonio Police Department**

**[Mark.Christian@sanantonio.gov](mailto:Mark.Christian@sanantonio.gov)**

**Office: (210) 207-7106**

Lt. Mark Christian has worked for the San Antonio Police Department for 22 years. He spent five years as a patrolman and member of the SWAT Team. He served as entry team point man, counter-sniper, and team leader before being promoted to Lieutenant. He is currently the Director of the Special Operations Unit, which includes SWAT, K-9, Hostage Negotiators and the Bomb Squad.

**Interview Summary:** Lt. Christian began his discussion of high performance by asserting that high performance cannot exist without “maturity”. He broke down this trait

by stating that officers must be willing to engage dynamic situations, but more importantly, they must be able to make sound decisions after weighing all available factors. These decisions must be based on training and the mission purpose and not on emotions. Lt. Christian believes that high performing SWAT officers have mastered their emotions and instinctual behaviors and are able to control their influence on decision-making. Next, Lt. Christian discussed honesty, and his belief that good SWAT officers will not hide from the truth about their weaknesses or poor performance. He believes that total honesty within the team and the organization is critical to building trust. He feels that intelligence is also critical. Lt. Christian provides a definition of intelligence that is focused on the operator's ability to learn and understand his limitations. He stated "tactical environments are very fluid in their nature and the officer must possess the mental acuity to adjust to unforeseen circumstances and apply novel and workable answers to previously unasked questions". Lt. Christian remarked that physical fitness is simply not enough, and the best operators will show advanced ability to apply what they have learned. He ended his discussion by advancing the topic of integrity and his belief that SWAT officers must have "a rock solid value system". He stated that officers cannot engage in "situational ethics", and he believes that the best operators will consistently engage in ethical behaviors.

## **20. Anonymous**

**Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.)**

**Critical Incident Response Group**

The following expert interview was provided by a 24-year veteran of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This interview subject has extensive experience delivering high-risk tactical service with over 11 years of tactical experience between the Hostage Rescue Team (H.R.T.) and the Critical Incident Response Group (C.I.R.G.).

**Interview Summary:** This special operator began his discussion of high performance by discussing physical fitness. It was stated that high performers don't have to be the fastest or strongest people on the team, but they usually maintain an above average fitness level with regards to strength and cardiovascular endurance. This subject stressed that high performers don't just focus on their physical weaknesses, but they take advantage of their strengths and use them to help the team. This interview subject mentioned the importance of above average tactical fundamentals, but stated that high performers do not have to be the best tacticians on the team. The ability to perform as a team member was also considered important to this interviewee. Similar to other interview subjects, this veteran operator stressed that high performers will perform any task necessary, in order to accomplish the mission, without complaint. In addition to the above, this operator emphasized that high performing operators are "trainable". Behaviors that reveal trainability include the ability to receive criticism, the ability to learn from mistakes, and the ability to conduct self-critique. Finally, according to this subject, most high performers create a life balance by maintaining an "outside avocation". Mechanics, woodworking, church service, and youth programs were some examples that this interviewee provided.

**END**