



Understanding the Valentis scenario qualification

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540 Delwar Road
Suite 3a
Pittsburgh, PA 15236

Author:
Steve Sutch

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INTRODUCTION

Each day, armed security officers go to work at a client site with the understanding they have been tasked to do a job. The job can be a combination of one or more responsibilities, but mostly, it is to protect people and property. It is well settled that very little training is provided to armed security officers by their employers or state agencies who approve these individuals to carry a firearm. Ultimately, the required standards to become an armed security officer are gravely inadequate. The belief any individual is qualified to work in armed security once they complete a state required course is very concerning. Michael Klein, Leah Ruiz, and Craig Hemmens offered in 2019, “When this lack of training is combined with the lack of educational requirements for the hiring of private security guards, we believe a potentially dangerous situation results as security guards, who are sometimes armed with deadly weapons, are operating in an ambiguous occupational environment without the necessary skills to ensure the safety of themselves and the public.” There have been very few changes, if any, since 2019.

A significant and problematic challenge stemming from the inferior industry standards is security officers are sent to client sites with potentially little to zero exposure to incidents they may face while working. The security officer may have law enforcement or military experience in some situations. However, even with that background experience, it is still largely unknown what role they had or how they performed during these incidents.

We must ask what quality service is being provided if we send individuals armed with lethal weapons into potentially dangerous scenarios. What if they react in the

wrong way, resulting in innocent victims being injured or killed? What if they do nothing even when the situation requires them to do something? We often incorrectly assume mere presence in a uniform and firearm is adequate to deter threats. On the surface, we can agree it is hard to measure how effective deterrence is when nothing happens. At this point, we can deduce presence equates to a successful evolution. What happens when deterrence becomes ineffective and an incident involves untrained and unprepared security staff?

TRAINING

The training, across the United States, administered to individuals to become armed security officers, generally consists of three parts: classroom, hands-on training such as handcuffing and potentially defensive tactics, and a rudimentary firearms qualification, usually including familiarization skills. The certification programs differ vastly from state to state. For example, one state may only require a firearms qualification to the 15-yard line while another will go to 25 yards. Supposedly, certain states believe threats are limited to 15 yards. The time needed to complete a course also vastly differs from state to state. There is no standard for private security officers to be certified to work armed. A significant injustice occurs when the standards are distressingly inadequate. It gives security officers a false sense of competency to handle incidents properly, safely, and competently. The chasm of inadequacy widens because the security officer will be hired by a company accepting this standard while pushing the service to clients who have no idea what they are receiving regarding capability or competency.

The misleading notion with all of this is at any given time, an armed security officer can be faced with a scenario that may or may not require the use of lethal force. Amir Khillah, a police officer, police academy subject control instructor, and a contributor to the online law enforcement resource website police1.com, pointedly made this statement regarding cadets in the police academy. Khillah said, "Instructors are expected in just 16 weeks to magically transform these guys and gals into new police officers. These recruits will be stationed in high-crime zones where they will be expected to hold their own." Mr. Khillah maintained the need to have stress inoculation training with cadets and police officers. Astonishingly, this article points out the misbelief that cadets who train after approximately 16 or so weeks are somehow highly qualified. Yet, there is an expectation armed security officers will have the capability of addressing active threats in less than two weeks or, in some cases, a few days of training.

Nobody can evaluate how an individual will react by merely requiring them to attend a course and going through the steps to pass it. If anyone spends a moment to think about it, then it is easy to determine how ridiculous it sounds. The widely accepted industry standards do not, nor will they ever, provide a proper evaluation of a security officer's mental, physical, or technical competency to respond to a real-world threat when the opposer intends to disrupt, injure, or even kill that security officer or someone else. At the same time, the opposer evolves, which means they are also responding to the security officer's actions or inactions.

REAL EXAMPLES

There is a stark difference from the Valentis point of view when determining if an individual is trainable or untrainable. When an employee is untrainable based on our basic standards and policies, we cut ties with them immediately. When they are deemed trainable, we commit to investing resources into their growth and career.

The first example is a new hire who completed all the required training for the entire week. This individual did everything they were asked to do and did it well. The last part of the training was to complete the scenario qualification. The individual ultimately failed while committing a use of force violation, potentially leading to a crime. They did not or could not justify their actions nor saw flaws with what they did. When discussing this individual's after-action report, it was easy to apply the logic of the Dunning-Kruger effect. In short, the Dunning-Kruger effect is a cognitive bias in which people believe they are more competent than they are and overestimate their abilities. They are misguided in what they believe they are good at but fail to seek advice from others who may see it more objectively. It essentially causes the individual to miss opportunities to learn from those who are genuinely skilled and knowledgeable. In this example, the individual never once accepted the opinions of their instructors and failed to recognize the shortcomings of how they responded. Their warped belief in being highly trained clouded their judgment. We determined the individual was untrainable, and they were terminated. This is generally the mindset of most security officers in the industry.

The second example is an employee working at Valentis for several months. When placed into a scenario qualifier, they completely froze and did nothing. The employee was tossed around by the role-player as if they were breathless and incapacitated. Before this qualification, the employee was expected to perform in the field when faced with a similar situation. However, the employee recognized their shortcomings, understood all prior training they received was practically useless, and understood the need to be retrained. Most importantly, this individual demonstrated a keen desire to reach the basic standards to continue employment at Valentis. All these mentions collectively illustrate an example of being trainable.

Both are examples of employees hired to work at Valentis Group, Inc. The first example resulted in the employee being let go without working a single shift. The second employee was offered remedial training and has since improved, working steadily to overcome their issues. The second employee's performance will not be solved in a single course of instruction, but recognizing and accepting shortfalls in capability are the first steps to improving. Notably, though, Valentis also recognized its shortcomings with the second employee when it allowed the individual to work for months without evaluating them. It has since been fixed.

In 2019, Vanessa Laureys and Marleen Easton wrote, "Consequently, resilience training programs were found to be efficient in simulated critical incident scenarios, demonstrating that training programs can be a useful preparation for optimal work performance and psychological resilience."

How does one measure up to this apparent critical need?

SCENARIO QUALIFICATIONS

In 2023, Valentis introduced the need to qualify its staff on stress induced scenarios involving role players, force on force, focusing on all elements of prior training administered as a requirement. The employee, in the qualification, is required to respond to the scenario, evaluate what is happening, and make decisions to resolve it. At the conclusion, the employee will write a report and then participate in adversarial cross-examination as if it's in a courtroom, complete with a Judge and Jury. The qualification evaluation consists of technical skills, critical thinking, and communication. The deep-rooted emphasis being evaluated is critical thinking.

Why Critical Thinking?

We assume it exists but never really measure the level at which the person can perform using it. How does critical thinking apply to incidents and our response to them? More importantly, why is it important? When a security officer or officers arrive on the scene in response to a call for service, it is widely unknown what will happen next or if it will quickly unravel, exposing everyone to potential injury. We can speculate on how it might evolve, but again, we never know how the X may react to what the Y is doing. We can consider that security officers may have information, before arriving, about the circumstances surrounding the call, if anyone observes weapons, and they may have potential known background information about one or more of the individuals involved. For example, if they had prior contact with an individual who was a problem in the past.

Critical thinking starts with the genuine understanding that the security officers must be mentally prepared for what may happen during this call. Anything can transpire, and it may evolve from a pleasant conversation to actively fighting someone to the

extent they are required to use their firearm to protect their life or someone else. All of this has the possibility of occurring and unfolding in a matter of seconds.

During academic training, Valentis teaches the OODA Loop. Former US Air Force Colonel and military strategist John Boyd developed the OODA Loop. Boyd's approach was to create a provoking thought and analytical process for military planners to develop the best strategy to fight the enemy. The OODA Loop stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. We use the OODA Loop concept daily to make decisions in our personal and work lives. We often don't comprehend how much it applies. When we train and repeat the same processes repeatedly, the OODA loop becomes secondary.

When security officers arrive at a scenario, the very first mental task they must commit to is observing and processing what is going on. This includes visibly looking for weapons and the surroundings to see if there is anything that may be a threat to their safety. Once contact is made, they must process what is being shared with them in the context of the situation. Sometimes, the security officers never hear the problem because they are instantly thrust into an active scene, e.g., two people fighting or much worse. However, this does not reduce or eliminate the need to mentally process what they must do next. It is vital to remember our physical actions are in response to what the brain is instructing. If we are not adequately analyzing the situation and utilizing critical thinking, we will react improperly, leading to a much different and usually negative outcome.

Once the processing reaches a certain point, the security officer will orientate to their next step and rely on that to respond. The most paramount point to share is the training and what training the security officer has. The adage that nobody will ever rise

to the occasion because everyone defaults to their lowest level is fundamentally true for all security, law enforcement, and military personnel. The training in this part of the evolution is not just defensive tactics, how to use a firearm, or how fast you can run two miles. It includes policies and procedures and logic to applying the use of force continuum.

The use of force continuum is often misunderstood by those who hear the word force and automatically assume it to mean the application of physical force, the deployment of a lethal weapon, or less lethal such as OC Spray or Taser. Notably, the critical first few steps of the continuum have nothing to do with restraints, strikes, armbars, or lethal or less lethal actions. It begins with the physical and outward appearance of the security officer, moves to establish a command presence in preparation to issue clear and direct verbal commands, only to elevate, if needed, to the additional steps if the threat evolves, with the lethal force, at the last step, if justifiably necessary. The use of lethal force also applies to unarmed security officers, but the contract security industry often turns a blind eye to it. Most fail to realize an individual can utilize any object within their environment to injure or eliminate a threat. Isn't that the logic taught in active shooter training, such as "Run, Hide, Fight"? There is also the art of listening to reason and gathering information before moving in one direction. The theory of listening is embedded into the use of force continuum. The orientation step is also where things will be problematic, and this is the step we focus on mostly during scenario qualifications.

Why is this so important?

The success of our security officers is strongly dependent on the quality of their decisions. We cannot expect quality decisions if they are not processing the information correctly and using it to orient to what they need to do next. Regardless of how well we have it figured out, the criminal or adversary will apply the same logic found in the OODA Loop. This process continuously goes on until there is a declared winner. We often say crime is becoming sophisticated, and those who cannot outwit the opponent lose. This is the logic we apply during scenario qualifications at Valentis.

Role players, often armed with training weapons (firearms, clubs, or knives) or sometimes the exercise will call for no training weapons, are given time to prepare in advance. They have developed, in their mind, a map of what they want to do when the security officer who is being evaluated enters the training room. If the security officer does X, the role player will do Y. The armed security officer, on the other hand, is faced with making crucial decisions as the scenario evolves in the controlled environment based on only initial information provided at the onset. This is similar to what happens in the real world.

A team of evaluators will assess the security officer on how they respond to the scenario. The significant mistakes often seen in this qualification are the need to escalate further than required unnecessarily, e.g., the application of physical force or the desire to go hands-on with one or more of the role players when there are other tactically advantageous moves. The latter decision often adversely impacts the officer's safety. Once the scenario is complete, the security officer will be tasked to write a report and placed into the cross-examination environment. Valentis seizes the

opportunity presented in scenario qualifications to offer remedial training in various topics, including but not limited to defensive tactics, public speaking, and academics. In certain situations, the security officer may be terminated. These situations include flagrant violations of our use of force continuum that most likely would lead to criminal or civil liability consequences, safety violations committed during the scenario that may lead to actual injury, and the failure to execute properly using their best effort. What does the latter best effort mean? When a security officer shows up at this qualification, we expect them to respond as they would in the real world. We are not interested in hearing from the employees that they would have done it differently in a real-world incident. It does not happen that way because the security officer will always default to their lowest level of training. We believe the time to make mistakes and learn is in the controlled environment, not the real world.

FORWARD-LOOKING

Valentis is firmly committed to continuing the journey to ensure its security officers are prepared to face the encounters they may have in the field. The paramount safety and operational success of its staff is priority over profit. Our model is designed to focus on decisively operating at the highest level because we owe our clients not to be subpar by industry standards.

In the first quarter of 2024, Valentis will unveil a new training environment designed to enhance and expand its scenario qualification capabilities. We believe personnel trained well will perform well. By providing them with the necessary tools and resources to address real-world issues, our staff will be better prepared to accomplish their objectives and most importantly, go home each day to their families. Moreover, as

part of our private-public partnership methodology, our new training environment will also be offered to our external law enforcement partners to hone specific skills such as close-quarter combat and room-clearing techniques.

Valentis is the difference.

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