DESIGNING AN ACTIVE-SHOOTER EXERCISE *THAT FOCUSES ON IMPACT*

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White Paper:
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Introduction

The statistics for gun violence in the United States are staggering. The number of gun incidents, deaths, and injuries rises annually. There is at least one mass shooting every day in America. Homicides by gun at work have increased annually, as have active-shooter incidents. It's no wonder that companies are anxious and increasingly interested in developing workplace violence programs, plans, and exercises.

Statistical Overview

Three Years of Statistics

Categories	2014	2015	2016
Total # of gun incidents	51,824	53,523	58.169
Total # of gun deaths	12,554	13,485	15,050
Total # of gun injuries	23,008	27,022	30,599
Total # of children killed or injured by guns	613	697	670
# of mass shootings	275	333	385
Homicides at work – Total # homicides / by gun	409 / 307	417 / ?	Not yet available
Active Shooters (FBI statistics)	4	7	13 *(as of June 30)*

Definitions

Before we go too far, it's important to understand some basic definitions to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

- "Workplace violence" (WPV) – Can include verbal threats, physical violence, and/or use of weapons.
    - o A WPV incident may sometimes lead to gun violence, an active-shooter incident, or a mass shooting.
- "Mass shooting" – Three definitions:
    - o Four or more people, selected indiscriminately, are killed, and the perpetrator is not killed.
    - o Four or more people, selected indiscriminately, are killed, including the perpetrator, who commits suicide.
    - o Four or more people, selected indiscriminately are killed, including the perpetrator, who is killed by police or bystanders.
- "Active shooter" – "An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area."

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Why it is Important to Understand Statistics and Definitions

We are often asked to design an active-shooter exercise. The first thing I do in this situation is to educate the company about why an act of violence is likely to occur. The most common reason violence will come into your business is not a random shooter or an act of terrorism, but by threats you likely already know about. There are essentially five categories of murder at work:

- Criminal intent: Robbery.
- Customer/client: Disgruntled, frustrated, feeling unheard.
- Worker-to-worker: An employee, contractor, or manager.
- Domestic violence: Affecting a worker.
- Ideological violence: Extremists and value-driven groups justified by their beliefs.

Most of these incidents are things that you likely know about in advance, which is why having a workplace violence program is so critical.

Developing a Workplace Violence / Active-Shooter Exercise

Once you understand the real threat, you can go about designing an appropriate exercise. Before you begin, however, there are several things that must be in place:

- *Senior management support.* This is essential. The best rule is not to surprise senior management.
- *Workplace violence policy, plan, and program.* Hopefully you already have these. If you don't, it isn't a deal breaker, but it should be your first post-exercise recommendation.
- *Exercise design team.* A group of three to nine employees (sometimes more) who can help you develop and write the injects.
- *Planning time.* You'll need 60 days to plan, maybe more, depending on the scenario, number of participants, or other factors.

There are basically two types of exercises that you can perform.

1. *Option #1:* Scenario starts **before** the perpetrator is eliminated or captured; the first 3 to 4 minutes before the police arrive and up to the moment that the perpetrator is dealt with.
2. *Option #2:* Scenario starts **after** the perpetrator is eliminated or captured and the exercise focuses on impact.

Deciding which is your best option depends on the situation.

For the vast majority of businesses, I believe that a full-scale active-shooter exercise/drill is not appropriate; here's why:

- First, it is difficult to conduct in an office environment. It is fraught with opportunity for confusion, miscommunication, and the possibility that some people will think it is real.
- Second, it can traumatize those who have violence in their daily lives. This is a more common occurrence than you might personally imagine, and you can bring up difficult memories for your staff.

- Lastly, as these types of drills have increased, so have lawsuits and other legal challenges. If you Google "active-shooter exercise," you will find many cases of things going south and companies being sued for negligence and trauma.

Begin at the Beginning

The question we always ask before we conduct an exercise is "*Why are we doing this?*" We call this the "silly little question." If someone says, "I want people to know what to do in an active-shooter situation," I would recommend concise and well-crafted classroom training instead of an active-shooter scenario that is based on option #1 (above). This classroom training should include:

- Review company's workplace violence plan and policy.
- Discuss what to do in an active-shooter situation (run, hide, or fight). Discuss where to hide, where the exits are, and how to barricade a room.
- Hold a walkabout: Break class into small groups and walk the office area, discuss where to hide, how to block a door, and other aspects of the 'run, hide, fight' model.

This is action-oriented style training will help people when something happens. When you include a small group activity like a walkabout, it is much more likely to stick.

If someone's answer to "*Why are we doing this?*" is "We are concerned about how we would respond after an incident, the impact to our employees, our business, how we would communicate or how we would manage our reputation and brand," then you need an impact-focused exercise.

An impact-focused exercise (option #2, above) starts **after** the acute emergency response phase has concluded. This means that the "exercise clock" starts after the incident is over (the perpetrator is captured or dead). If you start the clock before that, it is still an emergency response exercise and – this is important to remember – the police are in charge. There is not much for you to do until the situation has shifted.

An impact-focused exercise focuses on the aftermath and impact to:

- Your employees.
- Human Resources.
- Communications, and traditional and social media.
- Business continuity.
- Brand and reputation.

Now that You've Answered the Question…

Begin your exercise design process by listening… just listening. Develop a list of the key players, managers, and executives to interview. You want to ask them the 'silly little question': *"Why are we doing this?"* In other words, "*What do you want to get out of this experience?*" At this point, your job is to sit back and listen.

The answer to the 'silly little question' tells you everything you need to know about the design:
- Scope: Who should be playing in the exercise to achieve the desired results.
- Goal: What they want to get out of it.

- Objectives: Specific areas of focus to focus the player's attention on.
- Narrative: Response(s) to the question will inform the narrative.

If you design the exercise without addressing these critical and basic areas, you could end up not meeting expectations. The interview questions also help those you interview to achieve clarity on what *they* are looking for out of the experience. Sometimes they think they know, but they don't really until they start to discuss it.

For example, you might hear things like, "I want to…"

- "…make sure that the Threat Assessment Team has the opportunity to convene and assess the problem."
- "…see how the communications team manages social and traditional media."
- "…challenge the Human Resources Department to manage the impact to the employees."
- "…discover how quickly we can communicate with our staff and what we would say."
- "…find out if our business continuity plans would work."

The answer to the 'silly little question' will tell you everything you need to know. For example, you might hear the following concerns:

- *Does the Threat Assessment Team (TAT) know what to do and what their role is?* Concern about the TAT means you should have a meeting (or call) with the TAT either the night before or the morning of the exercise. This concern may mean that this is a person the company knows about and has been threatening in some way.
- *Are we prepared in the area of communications?* This concern is that the event will be highly public with lots of social and traditional media injects and should require the team to actually produce messaging.
- *Is our HR department ready for this horrible challenge?* Do they have the right processes in place? This concern will lead to many injects related to HR issues, employee impact, need for counseling, acute fears, and employee and family concerns.
- *How will we communicate in "real time" with our staff?* This concern will address exercising the emergency notification system, develop messages, and/or test their communications templates (if they have them).
- *Are the BC plans robust enough to manage this problem with seriously impacted employees and a likely loss of our critical facilities for a period of time?* This concern will lead to many injects related to the BC plans, critical customer needs, critical dates, equipment, work locations, and lack of necessary staff.

Exercise Plan

At minimum, your exercise plan should have the following components:

- Scope.
- Goal.
- Objectives.
- Agenda.
- Exercise artificialities and assumptions.
- Narrative.
- Injects.

Exercise Scope

The exercise scope tells you who is actually "playing" in the exercise and who will be simulated. You can't do any design work until you know this basic fact. The scope may include:

- Teams you want to exercise (crisis management team, executives).
- Identified business units or departments.
- Specific personnel or departments.

An exercise scope statement may be something like:

- "Activation of the Corporate Incident Management Team, all other groups are simulated."
- "The Executive Management Team is activated; all other groups are simulated."
- "The Communications Team is activated; all other departments are simulated."

Exercise Goal(s)

The exercise goal is the defined purpose of the exercise. The goal is a brief and clearly stated aim of what you want the exercise to accomplish. You determine the goal of the exercise is by understanding the answers to the 'silly little question,' *"Why are we doing this?"*

A clear goal is critical. It is the guiding light in the design process. Along with the exercise objectives, the goal drives the exercise design and keeps you on track. Here are a few examples of a workplace violence exercise goal:

- "Experience a workplace violence incident that impacts the company headquarters and its staff."
- "Assess the ability of the Crisis Management Team to manage a workplace violence incident."
- "Assess the readiness of the Communications Team to manage a workplace violence incident."

Exercise Objectives

The exercise objectives and goal(s) drive the design. Most exercises will have between 3 and 5 overall objectives for all participants. In some cases, there may be additional objectives for a specific team, a department, or location, again depending on what the company wishes to accomplish.

Objectives are not only used to guide the design, they are used to assess the outcome. They are critically important and will help to keep the design process firing on all cylinders. Objectives accomplish the following:

- Establish the direction of the exercise.
- Control the direction of the injects.
- Narrow the scope of the exercise plan.
- Keep the exercise and participants on track.
- Used to evaluate the exercise.

One of the ways I use objectives is to help validate exercise inject ideas. When a design team member has a "great idea" for an inject, I always refer back to the objectives and determine if the inject is helping meet these objectives or is it a distraction (regardless of how interesting an inject it might be).

Exercise objectives may include statements like:

- "Activate the company's Threat Assessment Team (TAT)."
- "Account for all staff using the company's Emergency Notification System (ENS)."
- "Activate the company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP)."
- "Develop a communication strategy to manage the incident."
- "Brief the company's Executive Management Team about the incident."
- "Assess the impact to the company using the business continuity plans."

When you look at those objectives, you can bet that the exercise you are designing will have situations and injects that will make those things happen.

Exercise Agenda

Many people ask how long the exercise day should be. There are many ways to accomplish your objectives; so the question I always ask is "How much time do you have?" The absolute minimum time for this type of exercise scenario is 2 hours of continuous "play time" (the time the team will actually deal with the exercise scenario) for the activities. I think however, to do it right, it takes 4 or 5 hours. This is because:

- It takes time for people to wrap their brains around the problem. If the play time is too short, they won't get as much out of the experience.
- It gives the players a better chance to work the problem, find out what doesn't work, come up with alternative solutions, and try those.

We prefer a play time of 2 hours, but can work with 90 minutes if that is all the client can manage.

The following are two samples of agendas for different timeframes.

Three-Hour Agenda

Activity	Time	Discussion Leader
Welcome	9:00 AM – 9:05 AM	Senior Executive
Workshop – Review WPV plan	9:05 AM – 9:35 AM	Exercise Leader
Tabletop exercise *(focus on the first 90 minutes after the perpetrator is removed)*	9:35 AM – 11:35 AM*	Exercise Leader
Debrief	11:35 AM – 11:55 AM	Exercise Leader
Next steps	11:55 AM – 12:00 PM	BC or Security Manager

* This is the play time.

Five-Hour Agenda

Activity	Time	Discussion Leader
Welcome	8:00 AM – 8:10 AM	Senior Executive
Tabletop exercise #1 *(focus on the first 90 minutes after the perpetrator is removed)*	8:10 AM – 9:40 AM*	Exercise Leader
Tabletop exercise #2 *(set the exercise clock to 4 hours later, focus now shifts to continuity)*	9:40 AM – 11:40 AM*	Exercise Leader
Short break to grab lunch.	11:40 AM – 12:10 PM	
Debrief	12:10 PM – 12:55 PM	Exercise Leader
Next steps	12:55 PM – 1:00 PM	BC or Security Manager

* This is the play time.

Exercise Artificialities and Assumptions

There are two more critical aspects of the exercise plan that need to be covered before getting to the actual narrative: artificialities and assumptions.

"Artificialities" are those things that are blatantly not true and exist only for the purpose of the exercise. These artificialities are created to make the exercise more meaningful or purposeful. For example, if the impact would be greater at month-end but the actual exercise date is (for example) March 5, you can create an artificiality by changing the scenario date of the exercise to be February 28, or whatever day would provide maximum impact of your exercise. Artificialities can include:

- Date change.
- Time of day change.
- Equipment that is available, or not available but is necessary to conduct the exercise.
- Conditions in place necessary to conduct the exercise.
- People removed from the exercise, such as key players who are 'on vacation and unavailable.'

"Assumptions" are those things you want people to have in mind about the day or scenario. In other words, players in the exercise might assume certain data points. You want them to assume the data points that <u>you</u> want, not the ones that <u>they</u> want. Spelling out assumptions helps to clearly lay out the ground rules, and provide clear instructions about what is going on. Assumptions can include:

- "Police will respond in their usual response time (list what that is)."
- "All of the staff who normally report to the EOC are available."
- "The media are responding to the incident with all major outlets onsite," or "The media are approaching the office now."

Exercise Narrative

The narrative prepares participants for the exercise experience. It provides the overview of the event; think about it as the beginning of the movie. The narrative describes the environment at the time of the exercise and provides all of the necessary background information.

There are many angles that can be used in a workplace-violence narrative. The angle you take, of course, all depends on the answers to the 'silly little question.' Narrative examples could include:

1. Terminated employee.
2. Domestic violence enters the workplace.
3. Contractor laid off.
4. Disgruntled customer or member of the public.
5. Manager goes off the deep end.
6. Random person off the street.
7. Ideological difference – radical political ideas or group.
8. Terrorism.

We rarely do narratives 6, 7, or 8. We find in 99% of our clients that they are many rich targets in narratives 1 through 5. They're more realistic and likely to occur.

Exercise Injects

The narrative gets the exercise started but what drives the exercise forward are exercise injects. Injects continue the story that began in the baseline narrative. Think about it this way: The only way participants know something is different or has changed is by the injection of new information, hence "inject" (sometimes referred to as "input"). So, think of injects as a continuation of a story; they are acts in a play or chapters in a book.

- Most injects ultimately ask the recipient to **do something**, so most will have one or more questions to be answered or issues to be resolved.
- Injects can also provide:
  o Additional background information for the storyline.
  o An "FYI" relating to an issue or situation.

Depending on the exercise, you could easily have between 10 and 100 injects, ore more. At minimum, our inject form includes the following columns:

- Time the inject is delivered.
- Who it is from.
- Where it goes (routing).
- The text of the inject.

Injects are the real "drivers" in the exercise by exposing unresolved issues. They are always pointing to the objectives, continuing to describe the disaster incident, environment, and/or situation and they stimulate the participants to action.

Here is a sample of some likely injects:

Inject #	Time	From?	Routing	Inject
			Corporate Comms	Someone has uploaded a video to YouTube that purports to show the rampage in the building. What do you do about that? What *can* you do about that?
			HR	Several employees are milling around the evacuation area, sobbing and unable to leave. They're too emotional, plus they can't get to their cars. What do you do for them?
			IT	The staff who left the building quickly did not take their purses or personal effects, including their house keys. They want to know when they can get back in to retrieve their cars and their belongings. What do you tell them?
			Security	The police have told you that the building is now considered a crime scene and all floors are off-limits to all personnel. It is likely to be 72 hours or longer. What do you do?

Conducting a Workplace Violence / Active-shooter Exercise

The focus of this whitepaper is only to address the aspects of exercise design, but not how to conduct an exercise; that's for another time. I would, however, offer a word of caution before embarking on this type of exercise. You have no idea who in your audience has had violence in their lives. The exercise could create a very difficult situation for them and you need to be highly sensitive to that possibility. Therefore, before you begin the exercise, I would recommend you always preface any exercise that involves violence by telling the audience the following information **before** it begins:

- The narrative involves violence.
- Many people have been involved with violence in their lives and this scenario may affect exercise participants.
- Participants should take care of themselves. Let them know that it's okay if they need to step outside for a moment to take a deep breath and collect themselves.
- Also, remind them of any company employee assistance program (EAP) options.

Going Forward

It is an unfortunate reality today that violence will enter the workplace. Take this threat seriously; it could happen in any business in America. The important point to address is what you can do to be adequately prepared. Here are some suggestions for your next steps:

- Develop a workplace violence plan and program.
- Get executive support for the exercise. This is critical.
- Pick an exercise date and select an exercise design team.
- Develop the exercise using the ideas from this whitepaper.
- Deliver the exercise.

- Write the after-action report soon after the exercise and make sure it gets seen by the right people to action the recommendations.
- Implement the recommendations.
- Repeat.

Biography

Regina Phelps is an internationally recognized expert in the field of crisis management, exercise design, and continuity planning. Since 1982, she has provided consultation and speaking services to clients in four continents. She is founder of Emergency Management & Safety Solutions, a consulting company specializing in crisis management, exercise design, and continuity and pandemic planning.

Ms. Phelps conducts over 100 exercises per year for her large multi-national clients. She has lectured extensively at international disaster and business continuity conferences. She is the author of three exercise design books: *Emergency Management Exercises: Exercise Design, From Response to Recovery, Everything You Need to Know to Create a Great Exercise; Emergency Management Exercises: The Instructor's Guide;* and her latest, *Cyber Breach* (released March 2016). Ms. Phelps has also designed college-level courses in exercise design, written numerous papers, and has given hundreds of lectures on the topic.