

The Will To Survive

With terrorist attacks and workplace violence so prevalent now in our society, Adam Coughran launched a company to help teach and prepare people on what to do in case of an attack.

By Rick Weinberg

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The room fell completely silent. The laughter had stopped. Tension filled the air.

Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, Adam Coughran burst through a side door, two guns raised over his head and wearing a vest holding more ammunition. He began firing.

But wait -- the guns and ammo were fake – they were made of foam. This was a simulation of a potential terrorist, active shooter or violent intruder attack. Still, it caught the attention of everyone in the room, making them think about how they would prepare if this situation were real, just like the recent San Bernardino and Brussels terrorist attacks, which came on the heels of the Paris attacks and countless others.

Coughran is a Southern California police officer who conducts events just like this all over the country through his company, Standards Training and Consulting. His multilevel courses and seminars cover everything from workplace violence to preventing criminal victimization. He prepares people on how to look for the signs, symptoms and indicators of crime, including workplace violence and how to react in case you're caught in the cross fire.

He even lectures on the psychological mindset of a potential killer with supporting videos and statistics relating to these compelling topics.

The seminar he is conducting today is at a Southern California water utility facility, a potential target of terrorism. Any public utility company is a target because of the potential large-scale impact on a population. Moreover, as proven in the past, a terrorist's goal is to impact the greatest number of people possible in the shortest amount of time and using a water system to do it is a serious concern for cities across the nation. Motivations for such attacks range from extremist ideology to rising utility bills.



"All my training comes from a practioner's standpoint – we are about changing people's lives, changing their behaviors and attitudes and mentally preparing them for the unexpected," Coughran says. "Most people aren't prepared for anything like this. The more knowledge you have on something, the less you fear. We determine what the fear is, identify it, then develop solutions to mitigate and conquer it. This training is all about the will to survive."

The moment Coughran burst through the door spraying foam bullets at the audience, the collective reaction was stunned silence. Everyone froze. The simulation taught them a lot about themselves. It made them think.

"I never thought about this before," says one participant. "It was very valuable to be part of this. This changes my whole perspective. Now I can prepare better for any kind of workplace violence."

As a mental reminder of the day's event, the participants are told to keep the foam bullets

on their desk – to remind them of what to do and how to react in case they get caught in a violent situation no matter where it is – work, a restaurant, school or a theatre.

After the simulation, Coughran tested his audience on what they would do if they heard gunfire outside the two swinging doors that lead into the conference room.

"Look around this room – how can you use things in this room to protect yourself?" he asks.

"I'd grab that American flag pole and slide it through the door handles," says one alert participant.

"That's perfect," Coughran says. "You can also use your belts too to bar the door."

Another observer says he'd use the tables and chair to barricade the door.

"Perfect," Coughran says.

Always have a plan – that is Coughran's message. Be aware of your surroundings. Plan your exit strategy.

He also brought up the scenario of preparing to help fellow colleagues who may be older, slower or even injured.

"You need to keep them in mind because if you survive and they don't, that's survivors' guilt times 10," he says. "Mentally, you're never the same."

Coughran breaks down his training and consulting into two categories, covering his team's experience from educational backgrounds to their daily craft.

The Neurolinguistics Division features such topics as:

- Leadership
- Team Building & Development



- Ethics & Ethical Comparisons
- Mission, Vision, and Values Creation
- Organizational Design
- Organizational Development
- Culture Development
- Government Partnerships
- Coaching & Mentoring
- Curriculum Development
- Criminal Law
- Time Management and Productivity
- Problem Solving

In Coughran's Invulnerability Division, topic highlights are:

- Violent Intruder Training
- Safety Assessments
- Workplace Violence
- Emergency Procedure & Policy Review
- Telephonic Bomb Threat Response
- Current Trends in Retail & Tourism Crime
- Contraband Recognition
- Concealed & Improvised Weapons
- Intelligence Gathering & Response

- Situational Awareness
- Criminal Behavior
- Personal Safety Coaching
- Fraud & Forgery Prevention

Coughran's team includes subject-matter experts from multiple fields within law enforcement and education.

"No one does this in such a comprehensiveness manner," he says. "It's unparalleled. We range from policy creation and consulting to training to running scenarios – basically putting the rubber where it meets the road."

Coughran's client list includes Whittier College, Biola University, Professional Security Consultants, The Art Institute of California, The California Tourism Safety & Security Association, Petra Risk Solutions and the Orange County Medical Association, to name a few. His company operates across multiple industries, including large corporations, medium and small business, government agencies, associations and even individuals.



Coughran has been an active police officer for more than a decade. He attended Chapman University in Orange, Calif., where he received a BA in Political Science and his Masters in Organizational Leadership. By his freshman year, he was already working as a police cadet. He had planned to become an attorney. Then 9/11 happened, changing the course of his life.

"When I saw the second plane go into the World Trade Center building, I knew that life would not be the same again," he says. "Something hit me that day – 9/11 was a wrong that we need to make right. I felt I could do more continuing on my current path in law enforcement than as an attorney."

After graduation, he became a full-time police officer where he sought out the department's counter terrorism unit, becoming one of its early liaison officers.

"When I reflect back, my family's foundation was always helping others," he says. "There's no one in my family who wasn't like this. It was always something more than yourself. It's not about you -- it's what you can do for others, what can you do to leave something better off than the way you found it. It was always about doing the right thing."

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