

IOWA POLICE JOURNAL

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE IOWA STATE POLICE ASSOCIATION



SLOW IT DOWN: No one ever gets in trouble for going too slow

By: Greg Erie, Waterloo Police Department



Greetings to all. I hope this finds you all doing well and staying motivated. It's hard to stay motivated during these trying times in the law enforcement community. No matter where an incident happens in this country, if it's perceived to be bad by the main stream media and pundits who support them, there is a ripple that is felt across the country. It's like throwing a rock into a pond. "Bad" incident on the East Coast? We feel it in Iowa. "Bad" incident on the West Coast? We feel it here, as well.

There are many articles in circulation today with catchphrase used by people who don't truly understand what it means and when it should be done: de-escalation. This is a hot button in today's main stream media.

Is there some validity to it? Yes, there is. However, to a certain degree, many of the talking heads overlook the fact there are times when de-escalation is just not *feasible*.

The supreme court of the United States, in the Tennessee V. Garner ruling, stated "when feasible, some warning should be given." They were referring to the use of force by officers. Feasible can be defined as "capable of being done or carried out." There certainly are times when it is not feasible. Facing a drawn gun is not the time; fighting for your gun is not the time. If you want to talk, do it *after* whatever threat you're facing is gone. Your mind is going to prioritize itself during times of crisis. If you're in fight-or-flight mode, your brain isn't going to be thinking: "Hmmm, now is a good time to start a conversation to address this life threatening situation I have going on here?" Your brain is going to automatically and without conscious thought gear your body up for survival.

Rapid heartbeat in response to fear, tunnel vision to focus on the threat, auditory exclusion because hearing isn't important in life-or-death situations and the adrenaline dump to mask any injury you may sustain or to perhaps make you stronger for a brief amount of time — the way this biology works is truly grace under pressure. It won't fail you, and that's a wonderful thing.

Is there something you can do to avoid the biological response during times of crisis? No, it's a biological response that's ingrained in everyone. Is there anything you can do to mitigate the effects? From personal experience, I'm going to go out on a limb and say yes. Training is a huge factor. The more you train the more experience you gain in regards to whatever it is you chose to train in. Get it?

A good example is boxing. If you've never boxed and I put gloves on you and tell you your opponent has boxed every day for the last three years, you can imagine how you're going to react. Now, reverse that scenario and it is you who are the experienced boxer facing someone who has never boxed. You're facing the same person; same ring, same gloves, but *you* are the trained one. Your reaction is going to be much more subdued and relaxed, which in turn helps you perform.

Having experience is only part of the game. You must have the mentality that comes with it and the confidence gained from experience. In law enforcement, this comes from years on the job. Newly hired officers react much differently from 20-year veterans. Why? Experience, that's why, and this brings up the next and possibly most important point.

Slow down. Everything that has been mentioned thus far can be correlated by those two words. Need to hear them again? *Slow down*. Going to a hot call, vehicle pursuit, shots fired...? Slow down. "No one ever got in trouble for going slow," a wise retired officer once told me. Does that mean being lackadaisical when responding or to tactics involved? No. Taking the time to breathe, having the discipline to tell yourself to think and slowing down is a forgotten art that comes from experience.

The ability to force yourself to slow down is something you must work on. It takes time and it's not easy. Training can help; experience can help. Believe in yourself and be confident in your abilities, but don't run to your death. Take it slow. Look and see. Think and breathe. Always keep in mind that the more time you spend talking to someone the less time you may spend having to fight with them.

Stay safe and ready, and train hard.

RIP Officer Adam Liddle, Waterloo Police Department. EOW 10-29-15

RIP Officer Susan Farrell, Des Moines Police Department. EOW 03-26-16

RIP Officer Carlos Puente-Morales, Des Moines Police Department. EOW 3-26-16

RIP Sergeant Shawn Miller, West Des Moines Police Department. EOW 08-03-16

RIP Sergeant Anthony David Beminio, Des Moines Police Department. EOW 11-02-16

RIP Officer Justin Scott Martin, Urbandale Police Department. EOW 11-02-16

About the author:

Greg Erie is a 22 year veteran of the Waterloo Police Department. He served on the tactical unit for 18 years. He is a control tactics, firearms and TASER instructor as well as a department armorer. He served in the United States Marine Corps from 1988 until 1994. He can be reached at erieg@waterloopolice.com.