

5 phases of the active shooter

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1. Fantasy Phase

During this phase, the wannabe mass-murderer dreams of his day of achieving an historic level of carnage. Often they will write, draw, and post this fantasy in a variety of venues, from their notebook to their Facebook page.

During this time, this potential demon bereft of empathy is surprisingly likely to share his thoughts and feelings with someone else. If this shared information makes it to the properly motivated professional, lives can be saved by that professional alerting authorities. That professional might be a teacher, a doctor, a counselor, a therapist or a law enforcement officer.

Too often, people dismiss these warning signs as “crazy talk” and do not take action because they are afraid of being accused of overreacting. Inaction enables carnage, whereas taking proper action can prevent it.

2. Planning Phase

During the planning phase, the potential killer lays out the who, what, when, where, how, and why of his plan. In other words, he will document who he will kill, what he will use to accomplish these murders, and when, where and how the slaughter will take place. In many cases the shooter will intricately explain the reasons for his intended actions.

Finding the plan on a hard drive or in hard copy form before the event will almost certainly ensure the plan will never come to fruition. These plans — or manifestos — are often so hateful and intent filled they will impact either the length of sentencing and/or treatment, depending on which venue is appropriate.

When these recorded plans are found in advance of the attack, lives will be saved.

3. Preparation Phase

After forming the plan, the mass-murderer-in-waiting must gather the items he needs to succeed. He must buy or steal the tools required to deliver death and destruction. The suspect will also visit the scene to gather intelligence as he finalizes the plan.

The preparation phase is an opportunity for a family member, citizen, school employee, businessman, or police officer to take notice of the suspicious nature of the accumulation of information and equipment. Relaying suspicions here may also save lives.

4. Approach Phase

This phase affords an opportunity for an alert citizen or police officer to notice someone dressed for combat approaching a school, hospital, mall, theater, or church carrying a weapon, or weapons. If the citizen calls 911 or officers spot the suspect, the soon-to-be killer can be stopped prior to reaching his target.

The “Terry Stop” is an invaluable tool for situations such as this.

5. Implementation Phase

Regardless of motivations, once they start killing these attackers are going for top score. What is needed is an immediate, effective, efficient act of courage. Seconds lost equal lives lost. An honorable gunfighter needs to intervene, take the shot and make that shot.

Even if unarmed — when fleeing is not an option — many potential victims have chosen to fight. Many shooters have been thwarted by an immediate, aggressive unarmed response by those who refused to “go quietly into that good night.”

It Could Happen To You

Officers out there must be alert to the fact that you may cross paths with an active shooter during the first four phases. Your powers of observation, your determined investigation techniques, and your grasp of how to apply the rules of arrest, search, seizure, or the emergency detention of the dangerously mentally ill may result in you saving lives.

You also have to realize it is becoming more and more likely that you may be the first honorable gunfighter to arrive at the scene of an in-progress active shooter — on duty or off. You may have to ask yourself, “Do I wait for back-up or do I advance alone?”

Realize, however, that when you hear those shots and screams, your feet are likely to decide for you. Most of you will find yourself instinctively drawing your weapon as you “ride to the sound of the guns.” Prepare!

About the author

Lt. Dan Marcou retired as a highly decorated police lieutenant and SWAT Commander with 33 years of full time law enforcement experience. He is a nationally recognized police trainer in many police disciplines and is a Master Trainer in the State of Wisconsin. He has authored three novels *The Calling: The Making of a Veteran Cop*, *S.W.A.T. Blue Knights in Black Armor*, and *Nobody's Heroes* are all available at [Barnes and Noble](#) and [Amazon.com](#). Visit his [website](#) and [contact Dan Marcou](#)