The Common Sense Behind Run, Hide, or Fight Training

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation*, "an active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area"* necessitating *"a coordinated response by law enforcement and others to save lives" (Active Shooter Safety Resources — FBI).*

Undoubtedly, the FBI is a knowledgeable resource when it comes to Active Shooters. They are called into these scenes, interviewing survivors, investigating motives, and subsequently providing comprehensive reports in the aftermath. I trust that their years of experience dealing with the shooters and the crime scenes has led to logical conclusions meant to keep people safe from violence. That is why, when the FBI recommends Run, Hide, and Fight tactics "*to keep yourself and others safe during an active shooter attack" (FBI)* I am willing to listen and learn. *"Learning these principles now will prepare and empower you to put them into practice—and survive—should the unthinkable occur" (FBI).*

With that definition, allow me to elaborate on the merits of the FBI model for Active Shooter survival. One advantage these tactics have is they are easy to remember, action-based words.

Run. If you are in a foreign place, you escape quickly and get away from the threat! In areas you occupy often, such as your workplace, you should have pre-mapped routes planned to expedite this step.

Hide. What if you are caught with no available exit? Get out of view of the shooter. Barricade and go quiet. Listen. Decide the next steps with those around you. There may be a chance to Run. Or…

Fight. Another option is to fight the assailant. This should not be seen as a third or last resort, as the situation may dictate fighting first.

Oftentimes, training in these tactics has presented them like a checklist. That should not be the intent. The actions are interchangeable, and the escalating event will dictate whether to run, hide, or fight. These verbs also align with our natural instincts, so there isn't a lot of memorization involved. Flight or fight are basic human responses, as hide-and-go-seek is a childhood favorite. I give the FBI credit, they could have come up with a trendsetting six-step response chart, complete with graphics and explanations, but they stuck to those tactics most folks will do naturally.

Additionally, run, hide, or fight training can be expanded upon, as needed, for the location and the audience. For a college campus, run may incorporate pre-determined meeting points. An office building with a single means of egress, however, may focus more heavily on hide and fight. When taught correctly, the learners will be comfortable moving from one tactic to another, as needed, throughout the incident.

A common argument posited against the FBI's model is the absence of preventative measures. The simplest rebuttal is that run, hide, or fight are methods to survive DURING an attack. Prevention is an entirely different conversation, and one that the FBI does cover in its overall Active Shooter training. Any decent program should detail preventative measures, from physical security controls to behavioral analysis.

As I look around at the wider security world, I see many training programs modeled after the FBI's tactics. It makes sense to have a standard protocol that most businesses can easily adapt to their needs. However, there are other Active Shooter training programs designed around catch-phrases and buzzwords, and typically these do not offer a practical application in real-world scenarios. Several "programs" reinvent the wheel, discrediting the FBI's model while endorsing their boutique offering.

The concern I have with these programs is two-fold: the reality of violent incidents, and the lack of cohesion.

Many people will lose their wits and fine motor skills in a violent confrontation. Unless these fancy Active Shooter programs are designed solely for prior military or law enforcement personnel, they simply are not feasible. Too many moving parts, too much to remember, a lot of fine motor skill necessities.

Secondly, as employees move from one company or workplace to another, having a new and entirely different survival program to learn can be confusing. The last thing we need is indecision during an emergency situation. I submit that standardization will benefit all members of the organization, provided that the training is location-based and customized to the site's needs.

In fairness, any training is better than none. And with enough coaching, many people could put even the most obtuse tactics to use. But by following a tried-and-true Active Shooter training program, teaching run, hide, or fight without excuse, the resultant simplicity will lead to cohesion across industries.