

“Police should avoid situations that increase the likelihood of lethal force and should work alongside mental health professionals in de-escalating conflict.”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Ochs, Holona, Police August 9, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing 

Police should avoid situations that increase the likelihood of lethal force and should work alongside mental health professionals in de-escalating conflict.
Prof Holona Ochs

from Curtis Gilbert, “Not Trained to Not Kill: Most states neglect ordering police to learn de-escalation tactics to avoid shootings.” APM Reports, May 5, 2017.

<https://youtu.be/yctf9FJDVrg>

“Did you see him comin’ at me?”

“I seen him comin’ at you.”

min. 3:02

“What he’d do to ya?”

I taz’d him. He just stood there. Busted everything loose, and he come at me swingin’.

min. 6:01

“He hit me a couple times, I’m alright, he hit me a couple times here and here . . . come at me swingin’.

min. 11:28

“I just don’t want her hearing this on the news or anything.”

min. 13:22

“I holstered my pistol, and I got my taser out . . . and I kept telling him . . . I’m going to taze you . . . and I drew and I shot him . . . I’m fine.”

min. 14:07

“I’m not second-guessing myself.”

min. 20:25

“You know the bad thing about it, Brent? I could’ve fought him.”

“Don’t second guess yourself. You did what Mickey had to do.”

not captured on this video

(full story at beginning of article)

selections:

Whether White did what he had to do remains a question. What’s certain is that he did what he was trained to do.

During White’s 13 years working for the Early County Sheriff’s Department, according to records kept by the state of Georgia, he’d received more than 600 hours of training on a range of subjects, including use of firearms, “vehicle pullovers,” “active shooter response,” “marijuana investigations,” and even “courtroom demeanor and testimony.”

In fact, on the day White shot Touchtone, he had completed a five-hour training session that included an annual briefing on the use of deadly force.

Yet he’d never received even an hour of instruction in the type of training that might have equipped him to better handle his encounter with Touchtone, who had a history of mental illness.

There are no unassailable, scientific studies showing that de-escalation training leads to fewer police shootings. But anecdotal evidence abounds.

Those who haven’t implemented the training are sending a message that curbing use of force isn’t a high priority, said Frank Zimring, a law professor at University of California-Berkeley who studies police shootings. “De-escalation is going to work only when saving civilian lives becomes an important objective of police administration and training,” he said.

“We never blame individual police officers for actions that they take, because when we look at the training that they receive, they’re simply doing what their training told them,” he said.

Officers need to “practice patience,” he said, adding that it appears White tried to resolve the situation too quickly, especially given that Touchtone was unarmed. “Things don’t have to be resolved within the first 30 seconds Let him sing all day. Let him stand outside his car and sing until backup comes.”

It’s not the first time White shot an unarmed man. In 2009, he tried to arrest a man after responding to a family dispute. The man resisted and began fighting White, who shot him, but not fatally.

Police shootings tend to unfold quickly. The shots that killed Touchtone were fired just 35 seconds after White’s arrival. De-escalation training is designed to help officers slow the action down, in order to afford them more than a few seconds in which to make a decision.

Evidence suggests that officers who go through de-escalation training come away with more sympathetic attitudes toward people with mental illness.

De-escalation training is controversial in the policing world.

The Fraternal Order of Police, which calls itself the world’s largest organization of sworn law enforcement, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police issued a joint statement in early 2016 that read, “We cannot reasonably expect law enforcement officers to walk away from potentially dangerous situations and individuals in the hope that those situations resolve themselves without further harm being done. Reasonable use of force in any given situation must be at the discretion of a fully sworn and trained officer.”

Some view mandated de-escalation training as a criticism of policing itself.

“Nothing is significantly broken in law enforcement right now,” he said. “We are better trained, better selected, better educated, held to more standards, higher accountability, with better policies than ever before in the United States of America’s history. Yet we’re in the toilet right now.”

In reality, an officer is unlikely to shoot anyone ever. But, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence showing that de-escalation training can save lives under the right circumstances.

“Intuitively, we know it will work,” said Wexler of the Police Executive Research Forum. “But I think for the short term, we’re going to have to be comfortable with anecdotal information.”

A handful of police departments have taken de-escalation to a new level and are honoring dangerous situations handled without bloodshed.

Today, in addition to medals for valor, heroism, bravery, and honor, Philadelphia gives out an official commendation for de-escalation.

Murphy recalled that the man “actually was thanking us for not shooting him. During the car ride back to our district, he was thanking us. He knew his actions were wrong.”

McAdams remembered saying in response, “Well, thank you for not making us shoot you.”