

Lesson 1: Left of Bang vs Right of Bang

Host: Welcome to the first segment in our school safety and security audio series with Mike McCarty from SafeHiring Solutions and SafeVistor. Mike, let's get the conversation started. Left of Bang and Right of Bang are very interesting phrases – what do they mean and why does our school audience need to know about them?

Mike McCarty: These are military concepts that actually started in the Marine Corps back during the Iraq and Afghanistan when those wars started. The military realized that they had to get into a different position and so most of the wars were being fought right of bang, which for the military meant they were only reacting to incidents that were happening. So, the concept of left of bang is, we need to be doing things, understand our enemy better or preventing and getting to the left of that explosion, so to speak.

Host: Are you seeing schools focusing on the left of bang concept or are they more focused on the actual threat and what happens after the threat presents itself?

Mike McCarty: So, everything we're seeing in the media's talking about reacting to making schools more hardened, locking doors, barricading buildings, arming teachers. Really, the national conversation right now is right of bang. And I think what we're really trying and to do is help them move that conversation to the left, to get to the left of bang and talk about things that they can start doing today to prevent an active shooter in the hallway. So, our goal is not to really talk through how you deal with an active shooter in the hallway, it's how do we keep an active shooter from ever entering our hallway.

Host: Sadly, there's been a number of school shootings over the past 20 years. When experts study those – what are some of the red flags they are seeing that school teams can learn from as we talk about prevention and firming up policies and procedures?

Mike McCarty: If we look at some of the incidents and start to dissect them, and Parkland gets picked on a lot, but there's a reason for that. There were so many mistakes made by so many people in that one incident. Really, this child should have been flagged 10 years ago when his father passed away. Somebody at the school should have been aware. This is a life-changing event for this child. I know when my kids lost their mother, it was a life-changing event and the school came around them. They were checking on them. They were checking on me.

So, then he loses his mother, what, a year or two ago, so now he's lost both. And there's a whole series of things that were happening in between there talking about weapons, social media, family members reaching out to law enforcement, saying he wants to be a school shooter, animals that are being harmed. You have Secret Service agent who has children in that school, walked through and did an assessment at no cost. Literally walked through that building within weeks prior to that event telling them, here's some things you need to do. Lock your gate to start with, keep people out, make it harder for them to get in.

So, when we look at some of these, it's like everything that could have gone wrong almost did go wrong — law enforcement showing up, not entering the building, just a lot of things happening here. So, when you look at that one you say, I think there's a lot of areas here where we hope prevention could have stopped this a long time ago before it got to this level. I think in many of these incidents, if we have a comprehensive plan in place and it's based on left of bang prevention that we're interacting with this child long before they become the kid who's so angered now and targeted violence and wants to come in and retribute something that they feel real or not that has happened to them.

Mike McCarty:

And I can tell you, one of our board members, one of our advisory board members is a former National Security Agency analyst. She's built threat assessment tools. And I ask her, I said, "Why do you only work in healthcare?" And I reached out, you know where she lives, Parkland, Florida. She has grandkids in that school district. So, after Parkland, she's like, "I want to help." And I said, "Why haven't you been doing this before with school?" She said, "I tried, but nobody was interested in what I had to do." She said, "Now everybody's interested because they understand now that we have lots of vulnerabilities." And that's really what she is, she's a threat assessment, active shooter expert. And so, we're seeing tremendous change.

Host:

When schools are looking at where they are vulnerable and doing assessments, where does school culture come into play... or even school location – like being attached to a church?

Mike McCarty:

Yeah. Every school's unique. And we talk about this a lot. Every school's unique, every school culture's unique. When we're talking about schools that now are physically attached to a church, maybe very different business operational policies that are in place. We see schools where you come through and you actually are met by an employee in a guard shack or some outward, what we would call a middle zone, where you're kind of determining who they are before they get any closer. So we evaluate all of these things. That's what a security assessment should do is really look at, how do I push that zone out further. That's really the goals.

Host:

You mentioned something important here — the concept of zones and specifically talked about the Middle Zone. Are there Inner and Outer Zones as well? Where does this Zone model come from?

Mike McCarty:

If you look at law enforcement in the United States, there's really one law enforcement agency that I would say is completely preventative in their mission, and that's the Secret Service. That's regards the president, the vice president, dignitaries. They spend an inordinate amount of time in advance work, preparing, looking at facilities to avoid any kind of incident. And so their model has, really, two key components to it that I think schools need to move in this direction.

One, they have a low or zero tolerance or threshold for threats. And I would say really our schools, most of them across the country, still have a pretty high threshold for threats. We see things, we hear things, we think, well, that's little Johnny, I know his dad. I don't think he's capable. Yeah, he may have said that. Whereas in the Secret Service, you put something online about the president and you're probably going to come in contact with somebody from that agency. So getting the threshold lower and then creating zones.

And so, if you look at the Secret Service, if they're protecting the president, they've got an inner circle, a middle circle, and an out circle or zone. So, if you're going to get into that outer zone, that's you showing up to an event where you hear the president speak, you're going through magnetometers, you're going through some screening. Nobody's coming

into that outer zone without some form of screening. Middle zone, now I'm starting to move closer. And so, in a school that outer could be busing routes, it can be the community that surrounds the school. As I move into a middle zone, we would think of that as more a building and everything that encapsulates that, parking lots, maybe athletic facilities.

So, the further I move into these zones, the more I need to know about you — who you are and why you're there. When I get to the inner zone, that's actually the school, or if it's the president, you're not going to get in arms reach of the president unless they know everything about you. I shouldn't be able to walk into your school unless you know who I am and why I'm there and that I have a right or a need to be in that school. So that's really what the zones do is help us kind of widen out that perimeter of safety around a school.

Host: So which zone should we assess first?

Mike McCarty: I think we're going to start in zone one. And I think where we need to get schools to right now is an understanding of what you need to start. And really, what we recommend is you're going to need a vulnerability or security assessment, and then it's going to move through these zones. It's also going to look at policies. It's going to look at training. It's going to look at sexual misconduct. It's much wider than just active shooter. But everything starts with, first, I have to understand what I don't know and where am I vulnerable?

Host: When schools are doing a vulnerability assessment...do they need to get professional help or will the school staff have that capability?

Mike McCarty: It's a great question, because right now what we see is a lot of kind of default back to law enforcement to provide this solution for us. I come out of law enforcement. My dad was law enforcement. My brother, my wife, my whole family comes out of law enforcement. This is not something I am taught as a law enforcement officer, unless I'm working in a very select area where I'm providing security for a president, a governor or some kind of specialized unit. So, what we're trying to do is develop a tool that you can use that will help guide you through that process because it's going to look at policies, you're going to look at the physical structure of the building. You're going to have to take, sometimes it's architectural design, if you're looking at adding a vestibule or something else to the front of the building. So it really is a bit more comprehensive unless somebody's gone through some kind of specialized training.

Host: So, the vulnerability assessment is important and you do need to work with someone who is trained in that area. Give us an example of something that a school could change policy-wise.

Mike McCarty: The vulnerability assessment is the foundation, that's where we start, figuring out physically threat behaviors. Policy-wise, where is it? Where are we vulnerable? That's the foundation for everything. Some of the things that really need to be addressed, policy-wise, as we talk about training is empowering every employee, that you have the right to call 911. What we see in a lot of these incidents is there's been all this training, if we need the police, it has to funnel through a certain person or the director of the security or the principal. Well, what happens if we lose that person in an incident? So just empowering — if you see something, say something. It's the biggest problem most people have is they see things, but they're afraid if I call 911, well, the police are going to be mad if they show up and it really isn't. No, that's exactly what they want and that's what they do.

And so empowering employees to call 911 when things are happening, when they see things or they see anomalies that need to be reported. Seconds matter, and that's the

reason. When we talk about these incidents, seconds matter. The shooting in Maryland at the newspaper, it was 60 seconds from start to finish. Seconds matter in that 911 call. Developing a consistent emergency plan. Schools in most states have laws and mandates where, I know in Indiana where we sit right now, it's a monthly requirement that they have a fire drill. Starting to see some policy push toward emergency plan and really doing this at least once a year. And so not only creating something on paper, but then how does that look in an event.

Reunification. Working through a private school right now, they have no plan. If something were to happen, where do we go? Which direction do we move? Well, you have to have a Plan A and a Plan B because if Plan A is to go to the right when you come out to a neighboring church and something's happening on the side of that building, we have to go to Plan B. And so not only having policy in place, but then being able to use actual, targeted with your law enforcement, practice sessions, so to speak, so that you practice what it is that you need to do.

A couple things is number your doors with numbers, nothing fancy, not the purple zone wing, not your mascot's name. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 inside and outside. Why? Obviously, you know why coming from the outside. The calvary needs to see which door if information's being passed along to them. But if I'm inside the building and I'm not part of your school and I need to relay information, I need to be able to look up and see what door that I am at. And so putting that information inside and out, not getting fancy with hallway names, keep them simple. South hallway, east hallway, just keep it simple directionally. So that in a crisis, one, you remember what hallway it is if you have to pass that information on. And those are just kind of some simple ideas.

Host: What about policies for having a school resource officer or an armed uniformed officer on the premises? Anything special in regard to weapons?

Mike McCarty: Yeah. Great question. We need to think through having locked safes inside the schools where the law enforcement officers can safely store the weapons they would need in an active shooter incident. And I think that's the first step is just creating a space for them, secured where those weapons can be located, where they can access them much more quickly.

If I have to go out of that building to my car as a law enforcement officer, retrieve my high-powered weapons — A, maybe I don't get back into the building if doors have been locked. B, that event may be over by the time I return. So share your plans, share the layouts of your school with your first responders so the first time that they come to your school is not during some kind of event, fire, natural, or man-made.

Host: Thanks, Mike for sharing your expertise in this area. In our next segment we'll continue building upon what we learned here. Mike will talk about the importance of Controlled Access and Communication.

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