

## Lesson 2: Controlled Access and Communication

**Host:** We're back for Lesson 2 in our school safety and security series as we discuss the Left of Bang concept with Mike McCarty from SafeHiring Solutions and Safe Visitor. In the last lesson we left off talking about vulnerability assessments and some things schools change or implement. Now let's talk about the school's front doors. Mike, how secure is it to buzz visitors into the school?

**Mike McCarty:** These buzzer systems are great tools. However, they have to be implemented correctly. And so simply coming up and I buzz and I do this all the time and the minute I buzz, there's no questions. There's no asking why I'm there, who I'm there to see. But the minute I engage that buzzer, I hear the door click and I'm inside the facility. So a lot of it is how we operate those systems more so than the actual buzzer itself. But they are only as good as the humans behind those pieces of technology.

**Host:** What do the frontline staff – you know, whoever is monitoring the front entrance and buzzing people in — what do they need to know?

**Mike McCarty:** Great question. These are the gatekeepers. And typically in most schools, the folks that we put up front are placed there because they're warm. They're the first person that maybe somebody's going to interact with as they come into our schools. Just like a business, we want that to be a good experience. From a security standpoint, that can be a liability as well, because a lot of times, if I'm a very kind, relational, friendly person, I'm asking them to also vet this person before they buzz them into the building. And sometimes that's maybe asking a series of questions. "Hi. What can I do? Who are you here to see?" Start to really put some pressure on them that they have to answer a few questions that really indicate that they are there for a specific reason and have a reason to be there.

So, a lot of training goes in to not only helping them understand certain questions they may want to ask before they allow them into the building, but to really get them comfortable in understanding why they need to be asking these questions and how critical it is. San Bernardino was a prime example in California a couple years ago at a school. A husband shows up, unbeknownst to anybody else, because nobody had been told that they're going through divorce. He had made threats on her life and there was a no contact, a protective order in place. So a few questions potentially might have kept them from buzzing this person into a building, whereas by not asking, oh, I'm coming to see my wife, she's a fourth grade teacher, I need to drop something off in the classroom. And he walked into the classroom where he killed her, killed a student and shot a third student. So, a lot of times it's just asking a few questions to ascertain whether or not they have a legitimate reason to be at that school.

**Host:** How do you train faculty and staff about being open and sharing with administration about things that might be happening in their personal life...Like going through a divorce or a custody battle? Or even being in an abusive relationship? That takes a lot of trust on both sides, right?

**Mike McCarty:** Yeah. I've spent most of my career working in domestic violence. I helped start one of the first domestic violence community-based units in Nashville back in the early nineties. So there's a fear of reporting in general. So the first thing is trust. I have to know, as an employee, I have to trust that if I give you that information, you're going to handle it correctly, you're not going to share that with people that don't need to know that information. But I also need to know as an employee that I have an obligation and a duty to the people and the students in the school that, if I'm in danger, they're in danger as well.

And so, a lot of times it's just really looking at it from a policy standpoint. Most of the times, schools will have a misconduct policy, you've got an emergency plan, you've got safety plans. But a lot of times we don't see a lot of policy around how you handle those interpersonal issues that are happening at home. That's really one of the largest volume crimes we have in the United States. And quite honestly, when we look at workplace violence in general, that's the greatest risk we face in a workplace is the interpersonal violence coming to work, way more likely that that's going to happen than an active shooter incident.

**Host:** What are you hearing back from schools as they focus on creating or changing policies to "get left of bang?"

**Mike McCarty:** It's all positive. And I think the feedback, because we're usually communicating with the administrators, and the feedback they're getting is not resistance. And I think there's always been a fear, if we're doing a lot of these things, we're going to get resistance from some of the rank and file and that's not at all what we're getting back from our administrators. They're getting support. The teachers are supportive of this. It's having a real cultural change within the school. And it really sets the tone, because what you're saying is safety is a priority and it's one thing to say it in a bunch of paper. It's another thing when you start implementing real change and real policies and it'll have a trickle-down effect all the way through the school, not just through the staff, but all the way through the students as well.

**Host:** How much time should school teams give themselves?

**Mike McCarty:** It's an ongoing process. And so as you make changes, you're going to have to continue to support those changes. So the training becomes a huge component here. And this is ongoing, you're not going to have one training event where you talk through active shooter for civilians or sexual misconduct or whatever you're training on — the kind of suitcase training mentality doesn't work. It has to be ingrained in the culture. On the public school side, we see a lot of these types of trainings being mandated now across the country, annual events from anti-bullying, even bloodborne pathogens, all kinds of different training requirements. And so, this type of training that supplements this new security program needs to be part of the actual ongoing curriculum.

**Host:** Thanks, Mike. We're going to end Lesson 2 on that note. In our next segment we'll discuss the tools to include in your school's safety tool kit.

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