

Lesson 5: What Schools Can Do Today

Host: We're back with Vaughn Baker of Strategos for Lesson 5 in The Threat Within series. Vaughn, many of the school teams listening today are gathered with their safety and security team members. And as we wrap up with this final lesson – are there key things these teams can put into place right away?

Vaughn Baker: Absolutely. We teach them some simple stuff they can do. One of the simplest, easiest low hanging fruit that doesn't cost you anything is changing processes. In other words, one of the things we'll say is, "Hey, if you want to create your first layer of lockdown each and every day, have your teachers teach with their doors closed and locked." In some cases, that's a necessity because what happens in some types of doors is the only way you can lock it is to step into the hallway and use a key. There's no lock on the inside. But if you teach with your door closed and locked, your first layer of lockdown is accomplished already when the crisis begins, and then you can create redundancy to your lockdown after you become aware that something bad is happening.

Host: Who can school administrators turn to locally to help them?

Vaughn Baker: Well, very frequently, some of our local resources would be our police department. Many police departments are taking steps to make sure they have maybe their crime prevention officers and things of that nature, those folks trained to teach them how the school personnel should respond. One thing you need to make sure ahead of time before we do that, is that our police organizations, that they are telling the true first responder, or the school personnel what to do prior to law enforcement getting there.

Host: So, you know how having a sign displayed in your yard showing you have a home security system acts as deterrent to a would-be thief, would having a school resource officer visible or having a police car visible on school grounds also be a deterrent?

Vaughn Baker: Yeah. There's nothing we can put in place that will prevent everything. But, yes. Having that visual deterrence of an armed protector there, in a form of an SRO, maybe a police car, otherwise could be a deterrent. On the other hand, it could end up making that person a target. That's why they don't put federal air marshals in uniform, because they don't want them to be targeted. They want people guessing, "Is there even a federal air marshal on this plane or not? Or which one is he?"

How we go about doing that could be important, but remember, no one step is going to be a catch-all solution. Just having that visual deterrence isn't going to be the only thing we're going to do. It's going to be a part of a comprehensive approach.

Host: It seems like more schools have front doors that are locked and you have to be buzzed in by staff. Is this a stop gap to keep someone with bad intentions from entering?

Vaughn Baker: Yeah, what you're talking about there is what many schools are doing now is developing controlled vestibules for access control. We do recommend that. That's a single layer, of

multiple layers of preparedness we're trying to put in place. When we talk about access control, we want to put it in a way where we can visually and audibly screen people before they come into our building. But at the same time, and they'll help us with other types of threats. Maybe it's a non-custodial parent that's coming to get their child, that's not supposed to have the child. That will help us screen those people before they make it into our reception level. Those receptionists, many times, feel very vulnerable when we don't have those kinds of solutions in place.

How we do visitor management becomes important too. Many organizations we come to, all they do is they make you sign in on the book. Well, in some cases, I'll sign in as John Doe. We aren't confirming who that person is, but we need to confirm who they are for asking for some sort of government issued ID as well.

Host: We've talked a lot about training. You're working with a lot of schools – both private and public. Are you seeing barriers when it comes to training?

Vaughn Baker: Yeah. Some of the barriers is, the first one is denial. They say this will never happen here, so we don't need to do this. Statistically, I will say, and I'm not trying to scare schools, statistically, it is not likely to occur. You prepare for crisis based on one or two reasons, or both — the likelihood of it occurring and what would the impact be if it did occur and we weren't prepared. Even though it's not likely, the impact and the consequences of not preparing are too great, so being able to overcome that "big D," the denial that it will never happen here, is one of the barriers.

Another barrier is just simply the cost. There's many things you can do that are cheap, low-hanging fruit. If you have somebody that's advising you, we call them high-tech versus low-tech solutions. Low-tech are very inexpensive. The cost becomes a barrier now for organizations that maybe don't have the funding. Maybe we need to put the need out there. Most parents are willing to invest just a little bit of money. When we talk about how much, it's very minimal in comparison. They're willing to invest a little bit of money in their child's safety. That's their most important asset, is their child. If we put the need out there, many times relatives will meet that need as well. We even had one parent, says, "Hey, I've been blessed financially. I'll take care of the whole thing." Being able to overcome that barrier as well is important, but we can't do that without putting the need out there.

Host: So, should we be thinking about safety and security differently in a K-12 school environment versus a separate elementary school or a separate junior high or high school?

Vaughn Baker: Well, you just listed two categories that we talk about. The first is that we talk about junior highs and high schools. Those are high mobility environments. Those kids in those areas can move. If we're talking about elementary, early childhood centers, daycares, things like those, those are high risk, but low mobility environments. Maybe we put more stringent solutions and we prepare even more in those areas because we know we're not going to be moving those kids from point A to point B very easily and very quickly. Maybe we put more of an emphasis on lockdown and giving them some purpose design tools as far as lockdown devices for the room. That a single teacher, that is young, many times elementary teachers are young, and we want to give them something easy to implement as far as lockdown devices.

Host: What would be the five things you recommend the teams listening today should do?

Vaughn Baker: Well, the next steps is first of all, I would recommend getting an assessment done. A physical security assessment. There's two types of assessments. You have behavior assessments and physical security assessments. But get a physical security assessment

of your facility, that is specific to the intruder response threat, as far as looking for opportunities for improvement there. That would be one of our first steps. The next step would be making sure we have plans and policies in place. Not only for this type of active threat crisis, but all types of crisis.

Many organizations will have a plan for the natural hazards, severe weather, fire. But they don't have a plan for the manmade hazards, the violence events or maybe the non-custodial parent that shows up in the hallway, walking up and down the hallway looking for their child. Putting those policies and procedures in place, and we also know policies and procedures are only as good as how you educate and you train people to follow them.

The next phase would be the training piece, and then the next phase after that, after we train folks, is then we drill it, and we exercise it occasionally. They've been trained. They know what to do. But, we're going to have a random drill every once in a while. It's going to be a very controlled, very scripted drill. We're also going to let people know that it is a drill at the beginning because we don't want people...Maybe we have a visitor in our school that is an off-duty law enforcement officer that's armed. We don't want him thinking that's the real thing if it's just a drill. We've got to make sure everybody, when we make our announcement, knows this is a drill as well. Those would be a few things that I would recommend as far as this process of improving on this topic.

Host: So, to recap – you recommend a physical security assessment of your facility, and to have procedures and policies in place for all types of crisis and emergencies, also to educate and train your people to respond, to drill occasionally, and communicate about the drill. Alright, well, that wraps up our final lesson. And so thank you to Vaughn and everyone joining us. Be sure to check out the additional resources from the Brotherhood Mutual Safety Library that we've posted on this lesson page.

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