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The Safer Campus

Security By Looking Around

- By Paul Timm
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As one violent incident follows another on college campuses, office buildings and other locations, security professionals are searching for ways to prevent these tragedies.

“Law enforcement and security people realize that locked doors, cameras and other security technologies won’t stop the next attack,” says Michael Rozin, president and founder of Minneapolis-based Rozin Security Consulting, LLC. “They want an effective method of prevention.”

In fact, there is an effective preventive method. It’s called Behavior Detection and Assessment, or BDA.

According to Rozin, who provides BDA training, the technique enables security and law enforcement officers — and others — to identify and stop a potentially violent perpetrator before a crime has been committed.

How is that possible?

“Violence has two components: a weapon, which is the means, and second, the intent to use the weapon,” Rozin says. “Technology is geared to detecting weapons. BDA enables you to identify a person with intent.”

Skeptical? Rozin points to a little-known chapter in the case of “shoe bomber” Richard Reid. Before his attempted attack on an American Airlines flight, Reid investigated the possibility of striking EL AL Airlines. He purchased a ticket and went through security. A security officer thought Reid seemed suspicious — he was checking out EL AL’s security. Officers pulled Reid aside and questioned him. Deciding he was a threat, they searched him. Since this was an information gathering/surveillance mission, Reid had no weapons — only intent that couldn’t be proven. No further action was taken.

But the interview was enough. Reid told his handlers that it would be too difficult to attack EL AL; security was too tight. Presumably, he checked out American Airlines, too, and when no one questioned him, he attempted the shoe-bomb attack, which, luckily, was stopped by alert flight attendants and passengers.

Still, how can a security officer identify someone who is only thinking about mounting an attack? Israeli airport security officers undergo years of training. That level of sophistication is out of reach of most security organizations.

BDA security is at work across the United States. Not long ago, for instance, Rozin trained security officers at a K–12 school district.

“One morning, about 45 days after training, a security officer noticed an employee entering one of the district’s schools,” says Rozin. “He was displaying what we call suspicion indicators. That is, he was acting differently than other school employees arriving in the morning.”

The officer concluded that the abnormal behavior might indicate a problem — a personal problem or something dangerous. He approached the employee and conducted a security interview — the term for a specially structured BDA interview.

After evaluating the individual’s response to the interview questions, the officer called for backup. The officers searched a small bag carried by the employee. Inside the bag was a loaded gun. The ensuing investigation turned up a nasty disagreement between the employee and the district superintendent. Security officers only recently trained in BDA had averted what might have become a tragedy.

BDA Has Been Used Longer Than You Might Think

BDA isn’t new. Many federal government agencies use the technique: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Bureau of Diplomatic Security at the Department of State, Federal Air Marshals, Pentagon, Secret Service and the Transportation Security Administration.

Where did it come from? Over the past 30 years, the Israeli Security Agency has developed and refined a number of behavior detection and security interviewing techniques for use in a variety of public and private sector environments. The goal has been to identify and stop high-risk individuals who might intend to commit acts of violence. These techniques have been used for years at Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, considered by many to be one of the safest airports in the world.

After serving in the Israeli Defense Forces, Michael Rozin completed Advanced Security and Anti-Terrorism Training at the Israeli Security Academy under the oversight of the Israeli Security Agency. After training, Rozin joined Ben Gurion’s security forces.

In the U.S., Rozin signed on as special operations security captain at Mall of America in Minneapolis and helped implement a BDA program. “This is an effective security technique,” says Doug Reynolds, director of security at the Mall of America. “I think it is growing throughout the United States — at retail shopping centers, commercial buildings, airports, government facilities and educational institutions.”

How Do You Identify Someone With Intent?

Rozin Security Consulting specializes in risk assessments and training law enforcement and security personnel to employ a BDA program called Suspicion Indicators Recognition and Assessment, or SIRA, a term trademarked by Rozin.

“A person intending to cause harm has a different purpose than everyone else in a particular environment,” Rozin says. “On a college campus or at another location, such a person won’t fit the contextual profile. On a college campus, for instance, students and faculty, carrying books and briefcases, move to and from classes, residence halls, dining halls, libraries, athletic facilities and so on. That’s part of the contextual profile.”

But what about that fellow over there? He doesn’t have any books. He’s dressed differently. Everyone else is moving about with a purpose. He’s staring at a building, and he is carrying what look like chains. SIRA’s suspicion indicators differentiate this individual from everyone else. He is utterly out of place.

In fact, Seung-Hui Cho, who carried out the massacre at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007, appeared on campus on April 14, two days before the attack, and rehearsed. The investigation after the shooting turned up a report from a faculty member, who observed an Asian male wearing a hooded garment, acting suspiciously, appearing out of place and carrying unusual items in Norris Hall.

Also on April 14, a student notified a faculty member that the doors to Norris Hall had been chained shut. That was part of Cho’s dry run. On the day of the actual attack, he chained the doors at Norris Hall’s three main entrances to prevent occupants from escaping.

Rozin points out that this behavior mirrors the way terrorists plan attacks. Like the shoe bomber and other terrorists, individuals planning an active shooting attack surveil their targets and rehearse their plans.

It is possible to spot individuals surveilling a site, taking photographs, making drawings and taking notes. Such an individual would stand out. The same is true of an individual rehearsing an attack.

But what about the idea that most active shooters suffer from mental illness? They don’t surveil a target or rehearse, do they? Don’t they just start shooting?

While active shooters may suffer from mental illness, they don’t usually just snap and start shooting, Rozin says. In fact, most want to succeed in their goal of killing a lot of people before committing suicide or being killed by the police. So they plan an attack, surveil likely targets and rehearse. Detecting these activities and conducting a security interview can deter an attack by making it seem unlikely to succeed.

Because the goal of an individual surveilling in advance of an attack, rehearsing or undertaking an attack differs from the goals of everyone else in a particular area, he or she will look different and out of place.

That is a suspicion indicator that should lead to a security interview.

The Security Interview

Rozin emphasizes that an appropriate attitude is critical to conducting a security interview.

“Remember that suspicion is not proof of guilt,” he says. “So a security interview is not conducted with an authoritative attitude. The goal — and this is important — is not to prove that a person is planning or carrying out a violent attack. The goal is to refute the suspicion indicators by talking in a friendly, conversational and non-authoritative way.

In fact, that is usually what happens. It turns out a person looks upset because he or she feels ill, grimaces from pain caused by a bad back, seems lost because he or she has never been here before. In these cases, the individual will generally respond to an offer of help, and the security officer will make a new friend for the university by providing a welcome service.

Not always, though. Rozin trains officers to pay close attention to the subjects of security interviews. Do they seem unnecessarily nervous, distracted or confused? Do they respond to friendly questions, or do they seem to be hiding something?

Rozin’s training includes an in-depth look at the structure of security interviews and how to interpret them. To oversimplify by way of illustration, he looks for “detection apprehension.”

“Even a friendly and conversational security interview is stressful for a perpetrator — who, of course, fears being caught,” Rozin says. “A well-structured interview can increase the stress or the detection apprehension felt by a suspect, which may frighten off someone rehearsing an attack or enable security officers to prevent an actual attack.”

And that, of course, is what everyone has been hoping for.

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