



New York Society of Association Executives



Active Shooter at Your Meeting: What Do You Do?

By Michael Cummings

One of the educational sessions at NYSAE's [Meet NY](#) for meeting planners and the hospitality industry was called *Active Shooter in Your Workplace, Meeting, or Convention: What Do You Do?* It was presented by Kathleen M. Thompson, Detective, Counterterrorism, NYPD.

Once I got over the unpleasant subject matter ("hey, can't we just talk about dessert trends for meetings?") I found it to be very informative. Unfortunately, between recent events in Paris, France, and San Bernardino, California, this topic is something we all need to be aware of.

A theme of session was awareness and the old "if you see something, say something." It was recommend that we keep our eyes on the lookout for out-of-the ordinary behavior. Customer-facing hotel staff, in particular, have a unique vantage point for recognizing things that seem out of place. For instance, if a door that is usually open is locked or if someone whom you do not recognize is lurking around the lobby, you should probe further.

Even if it's not a shooter (such as with the recent Nashville Marriott [Erin Andrews case](#)), it is essential for hotel staff to be aware of excessively nosy people or people whom you do not recognize "repairing" something. It reminded me of an office I worked in several years ago: A guy with a ladder and a nametag showed up one day. He was friendly and tinkered around a bit, and everyone assumed he worked for building facilities. He was actually an enterprising thief with coveralls who managed to steal half a dozen wallets and purses from our cubes that day.

Ultimately, 911 is your friend. But keep in mind that mobile phones do not automatically provide the police with

address information like landlines do, so always know the address of where you are, particularly important if you are at an unfamiliar location such as an offsite meeting.

If you are in a potentially critical situation, follow the ABCs, the following choices to consider:

A = Avoid. Also known as "run away." Basically, if you can get out, get out. This is a good reminder for people to be aware of exits before they settle in somewhere. You are better safe than sorry and in the early chaos of a shooter situation you should try to slip away.

B = Barricade. Or hide. Detective Thompson showed a training video of different types of office coverage (cubicles, desks, and file cabinets) to see how they served as protection against four kinds of firearms/ammunition (a 38, a 9mm, a 12 gauge, and an AK37). Desks and cubicles provide no coverage whatsoever but a file cabinet (filled with files) provided the layers needed to slow down a bullet. We were also reminded to make certain our phones have both their ringer and vibrate features set to "off" if we are hiding. Unfortunately, a vibrating phone can be very noisy.

C = Confront. Fighting back is something that can surprise and disengage a shooter. Many in the audience seemed to think of this option as something they would be inclined to do, but Detective Thompson reminded us that "one never knows" how one will react in a situation. However, fighting back as a group or even throwing office supplies at a shooter can be effective; if a shooter has things being thrown at his head, he is using his hands to cover his face and cannot shoot.

Someone in the audience asked if "playing dead" was ever a good option. Detective Thompson said only as a last resort. The shooters in many real cases shot people multiple times, even after they were down and still. One shooter was documented as having engaged at target practice at a gun range and requesting that the targets be positioned supine, as if they were flat on the floor.

Ultimately, a lot has changed since the school shooting in Columbine. At that time, the police department treated the shooting like a hostage situation. Since then, all police departments have adopted the understanding that shooters are not interested in negotiation but are terrorists, seeking to cause the most death. Consequently, today all active shooter situations are treated like terrorists attacks.

For more information, visit the [Department of Homeland Security](#) or the [NYPD](#) Counterterrorism Unit.

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