

## **Outcome vs. Process Thinking in Law Enforcement**

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Imagine sitting one afternoon, enjoying watching a little league game. As you listen to the various parents who are attempting to helpfully coach their little ones to victory, you start to notice two very different coaching styles. The first parent yells to their child “hit the ball! Get a homerun!” The second parent tells their child to “adjust your stance, choke up on the bat, watch the ball, and follow through with your swing.” The difference between the two styles of coaching is an example of outcome thinking vs. process thinking. The outcome thinker is only focusing on the end result and/or goal of a given situation while the process thinker is evaluating a variety of possible steps that need to be taken to reach a particular goal.

In law enforcement, imagine the law enforcement officer who is dispatched to a burglary in progress or who is involved in a high-speed pursuit. The outcome-thinking officer is just thinking about getting to the scene or catching the suspect. In getting to the scene or catching the suspect, the outcome-thinking officer may not consider different routes that he could take to reach a given destination or the effects that other vehicles may have on his pursuit. In another instance, imagine the outcome-thinking law enforcement officer who is trying to arrest a suspect that begins to resist. That officer’s goal is to arrest the suspect and they are focusing only on that end. So even though the suspect is resisting, the outcome-thinking officer keeps pulling on the suspects arm, using the same technique, trying to gain compliance. In both situations, the outcome-thinking officer has developed tunnel vision and is unable to see that there are multiple strategic interventions to these scenarios.

Where the outcome-thinking law enforcement officer is focusing on the end result of a situation (i.e. “Hit the homerun”) the process oriented thinker is focusing on the steps that are necessary to achieve the desired goal (i.e. “adjust your stance, choke up on the bat, watch the ball, and follow through with your swing”). The process oriented law enforcement officer not only focuses on how to achieve a desired goal, but they are also able to generate multiple strategies to accomplish their task. So when the process-thinking officer becomes involved in a resistance situation they do not keep pulling on the arm in the same way they were prior to the suspect resisting, rather, they evaluate the situation and utilize other strategies that will give them the upper-hand to obtain compliance.

There are many reasons that people develop into outcome oriented thinkers rather than process oriented thinkers. One particular factor that leads to outcome oriented thinking is technology. Although technology has made life easier in some ways, it also affects how people think and approach the world. For example, most people use spell-check

programs on their computers and calculators to assist them with math problems. Spell-check programs and calculators are extremely useful tools. However, these tools are outcome oriented tools. They allow people to focus on the outcome of a task (correct spelling and accurate mathematical solutions) rather than the process (knowing how to spell or using a dictionary and completing long division).

To help law enforcement personnel become process oriented thinkers, it is important to train them to focus on techniques not trophies. This means that they learn to evaluate how to accomplish a particular task as opposed to simply placing their focus on whether or not the task was completed. This can, in part, be accomplished through an emphasis on creating process oriented thinking through both didactic and experiential training that poses the question "what if." Law enforcement officers can be trained to be able to always look at a variety of possibilities in every situation without succumbing to tunnel vision.

If you are interested in further information about outcome vs. process thinking in law enforcement please contact Nicoletti-Flater Associates at 303-989-1617 or on the Web at [www.nicoletti-flater.com](http://www.nicoletti-flater.com).