

# ENTERING THE UNKNOWN

BY LUKE SHERMAN



*Entry* – any procedure to gain admission

- A place of entrance, such as a door or lobby
- The right, means, or opportunity to enter a place

*Movement* – progress, progression, advance

- Always accompanied with motion

The actual theory and thought process behind these words as they relate to police tactics has been and will be heavily debated in our noble profession for years to come. When dealing with barricade and warrant operations, one fact remains invariable in this debate — unless some type of

entry is eventually made, the specifics of what is in the room or space will not be discovered or determined. For barricade situations, entry should only be made when prudent, after all other tactical options have been exhausted. For warrant incidents, tactical operators should apply the priorities of life, coupled with the

objectives of the warrant service, to plan their mission's movement.

As police officers, we are taught to be problem-solvers. In the world of tactical movement, the same theory applies. Movement has a designed, specific purpose. Whether it is to locate, clear, intercept, save or aggress, movement is most often accompanied by some type of entry.

We design our responses to each incident according to our mission. Because each incident is unique, the parameters related to our strategy and tactics will vary, but one constant remains: *the priorities of life*. These priorities, namely hostages first, followed by innocent persons, then police personnel, and finally the suspect, are the cornerstone of how we define each mission.

Police personnel are taught to identify their mission, apply the priorities of life to the mission and then formulate their strategy and specific tactics to handle the mission. As great emphasis is and should be placed on the safety of all involved, the debate rages on as to how to enter the room in the safest fashion.

As both a student and instructor of tactical philosophy and movement, I have seen a myriad of different ways to enter a room: cross and hook, hook and cross, crisscross, high-low, step around-crisscross, step around-gun depress-crisscross, shoulder to shoulder, double button hook, quick peek, entering with a shield, etc. Some of these techniques are done at the speed of a turtle, and some are done much faster. I have even seen a discipline that believes in “painting” a room with light, imprinting a mental image of the room and then entering the room in the dark, without any type of mechanical assistance to see. The point I am trying to make is that we have tried just about everything regarding how to enter a room.

I believe what is lost in all of this is the simple fact that the debate over *how* to enter the room has clouded that which is more critical than the movement itself — the evaluation process during the actual entry.

Are we moving to find the suspect or clearing to find the suspect? Although the question is a simple one, and

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most operators would intuitively answer by saying they are clearing to find the suspect, I would suggest the possibility of a different answer to the question. My experiences, both as an operator and instructor, have led me to believe that a significant percentage of tactical elements commit to moving into spaces with minimal visual clearing prior to entering that area.

When instructing, I task two operators to perform a two-man entry into a room while the rest of the class is observing. Invariably, as they prepare to enter the room, the two operators carefully orchestrate their “dance steps” prior to making their entry. As tactical operators, we are so focused on performing the proper steps and movement that the more critical facet of movement — the actual evaluation process during entry — is often overlooked. However, think about this: mismanaging your steps to get into a room is much less likely to get you killed than missing a critical observation prior to entry, in the threshold of the doorway, or while entering the room.

Great emphasis is placed on getting through the fatal funnel of the door, and some disciplines go a step further, mandating a hard push to the deep corners. Why? Operators, moving while covering themselves or others, must be able to process what they are observing during the movement. Observe the deep corners, but do not rush into them.

I present you with a simple scenario: if you were tasked with clearing a corner with a pile of leaves in which a black mamba snake was hiding, would you jump into the pile of leaves at a high rate of speed? Or would you identify some way to slowly assess the leaves to determine the whereabouts of this aggressive, and very ill-mannered, poisonous snake?

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Wouldn't it be more prudent to identify a threat immediately, outside or in the threshold of the doorway, rather than when you are inside the room bearing down on the suspect? With this thought process in mind, I would again ask you to remember the priorities of life. Is any officer's life more important than that of a barricaded criminal lying in wait to ambush the searching officers? I say yes, *every time*.

In conclusion, remember that the faster you move, the more stress you place on your brain's ability to process what it is seeing. Also, with every move, you create an opposite reflective angle to your movement. So be aware. Give yourself a chance to win the battle, because the lives of you and your teammates depend on it. ■

*The purpose is to win, not to fight.*  
“The Art of War,” Sun Tzu

#### About the author



Sgt. Luke Sherman is a 20-year veteran of the Tulsa (OK) PD, serving more than 10 years with the department's Special Operations Team. Sgt. Sherman is an NTOA instructor and served as a member of the board of directors.