



You would think that in the event of needing to put oneself between middle schoolers and a hunting rifle that you would have more training than being required to read a piece of paper with a list of rules on it, right?

Except that's what happened to me at my first job. I used to be a summer camp counselor, and it was the summer of 2018, in Belton, Texas. A week prior to camp activities starting saw the training and coordinating of staff and operations, during which time myself and my fellow counselors were getting to know one another and familiarize ourselves with the handbook and the property. One of the most important pieces of information, although I hadn't known it at the time, was the procedure for what to do when faced with an armed gunman.

The paper listed a series of rationales, but basically broke down into five rules.

- 1) If you see someone unfamiliar or violent in nature, radio it in using the designated code. Do not engage them directly.
- 2) If the suspicious call is broadcast, secure your campers in the nearest lockable building and barricade the door.
- 3) Do not open the door for anyone. Wait for the police to physically break it down.
- 4) If violence is intended against your campers, get between them and the aggressor.
- 5) Until you know for sure what is happening, don't tell your campers anything.

Rule 5 was the one that got me the most. The reason for it was that our property was smack-bang in the middle of a forest, and was populated with deer. During the summer, hunters often would wander around with the full intention of having veal for dinner, so occasionally they would cross onto the camp's territory on accident with some really big guns. I think it would have been bad if the parents of our company had known that when sending their kids to live with us for a week or two.

Obviously, despite that, the piece of paper still wasn't enough for actually facing that scenario when it happened.

It was my third week on the job, and it had been raining for two days into our weekly programming, and the rain had canceled a lot of our planned activities. We'd spent so long indoors that by June 21st, 2018 that when it was sunny instead of raining, my campers were excited as I was to spend the day outside. All of the outdoor activities I had planned out in my head were at the forefront of my mind that morning, but by the end of the day, the only thing I could think of was Rule 5.

After the morning routine and the usual walk to the dining hall, my campers were rushed inside the building by my boss, along with my co-lead. I was pulled into a meeting with my supervisor and other camp staff and told that the campground property was officially on lockdown as of that morning. An unfamiliar car was registered in the parent parking lot, and when the vehicle was inspected, multiple types of ammunition and a firearm were found inside. No driver was found.

The first thought in everyone's mind was the worst-case scenario. That year, there were 116 school shootings in the US. Just over a month prior to the event I am describing now, a school shooting only 200 miles from my workplace killed ten and injured thirteen people. Now I didn't work at a school, but I was working with kids, and this was one scenario among many that our parent company had prepared us for only two weeks prior. (Hanna)

We would spend the next three hours keeping our campers in the dining hall without being able to tell them why. The nearest bathrooms were outside the building and only had two toilets in, so the campers went in pairs. A counselor had to escort them and make sure that they were walking between them and the building as if that would make a difference if a gunman started firing at the campers.

Eventually, we had to take the kids back out and resume the day as normal. Even though the stranger had not yet been found, we couldn't keep them inside forever without an explanation, so my co-counselor and I split off with our respective campers and tried to make the day as normal as possible. We did crafts, ate lunch, played games, and pretended everything was fine. We did a good job mostly, right up until the hiking trails caught fire of course.

It was nearly 2 o'clock in the afternoon when the smoke was spotted. The police and fire crews were still searching for the missing driver, and they quickly took care of the problem, but not fast enough to have our campground run it's second emergency procedure of the day, only this one had one rule.

- 1) Gather everyone in a line outside and take roll for inspection

The last thing you want to do when trying to protect people from an armed gunman is put everyone in the same place lined up like targets. We were also suspicious because while brush fires were fairly common that 115-degree heat, it had still been raining for two days prior. Nothing was dry enough to burn. Nonetheless, we had rules to follow so we lined everyone up, and took roll.

In the end, the search crews did find the gunman, and as it would turn out, he had been more interested in shooting the deer instead of our campers. They escorted him off the property with a warning, and left unceremoniously, and that it. We never found out his name, our campers never found out about the threat, and their parents picked them up three days later never knowing how much danger their kids could have been in.

It is stories like this that reveal the true problem with guns in this country. For the most part, as long as a firearm is legally obtained, and safely operated, anyone can do what they want with a gun. But the safe

operation of firearms is a near-invisible line, just like the borders of our camp property, due to inadequate training, underdeveloped response scenarios, and the underprepared individuals who get hurt.

Moving forward, any area that has a dense traffic population needs to be more prepared in the event of gun violence, and people need to be designated and trained as authority figures for when that happens. And that training needs to be tried and tested before being administered to prevent accidental traumatization, like in the case of the Chicago Public School System, who hired strangers to wear masks and attempt forced entries on classrooms unexpectedly, or a district in Indiana that prepared teachers for gun violence by actually shooting them with rubber bullets. (Eaton-Robb) (Cherney)

Above all, when these training procedures are put in place, we need to keep the victims in mind. I know that if it had been my child attending that summer camp, I would have wanted to know there was something more keeping them safe than a 19 year-old with a list of instructions, and I would have wanted to know that there was danger in the first place. If I was a camper, I would have liked to have known that something was wrong, and what steps I could have taken to make sure I was safer that day. And as a counselor, I know that if that gunman had pointed his weapon at my campers, I would not be here to write this article now, because even if I had followed those five rules, they would have not been enough to help me save anyone, let alone myself.



"Supplies List" by Anonymous (A visual commentary on gun violence disproportionately affecting black teenage males)

Sources:

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