Lessons on an Effective Security Program from the "Manifesto" of an Active Shooter

We typically steer away from sharing anything that will lend to the notoriety of or provide a platform for those who commit mass shootings as it has been demonstrated time and again that the notoriety in and of itself is a motivating factor for some of those who commit these horrendous acts. With that in mind, I think that the following piece of advice to other aspiring murders posted online in the "Manifesto" of the individual who shot forty six people, killing twenty three of them, in a Wal-Mart in El Paso, Texas on August 3rd, 2019 is something that all of us who are charged with protecting people should be paying attention to:

"Remember it is not cowardly to pick low hanging fruit. AKA Don't attack heavily guarded areas to fulfill your COD fantasy. Attack low security targets... Do not throw away your life on an unnecessarily dangerous target. If a target seems too hot, live to fight another day."

As we design the programs to protect our organizations, their customers, and employees we must keep this front of mind. How do we portray a strong enough security posture to dissuade attack, yet still remain an inviting open environment for our legitimate customer base? Some basic security program elements that are effective at this include:

- Use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) methodologies to reinforce our ownership and control of the space.

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Drew is the President and Principal Consultant for Security Advisors Consulting Group a consulting firm which offers security assessment, training, and litigation support services.

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At these organizations and throughout his consulting career Drew has helped organizations develop effective security programs that are optimized to help prevent incidents of violence. He has also published several articles and is a sought after speaker on the topic of violence prevention, some of which have addressed an incident that he was involved in early in his career where effective security program elements prevented an attempted active shooter incident at a healthcare facility.

- Surveillance to identify suspicious behavior. This is most effective if it is not just limited to overview by security cameras that are being watched in a control center, but if it also includes an educated employee population who can identify and are empowered to report behaviors of concern.

- An effective and timely response to suspicious behavior or to minor incidents. The majority of mass shooters have conducted their own pre-attack surveillance in one form or another. Even if they are not testing your Security responsiveness, they will observe whether incidents draw a response or if they go unchecked.

- Reporting, documentation, analysis, and effective internal communication of identified suspicious behaviors. While one appearance of an individual who could potentially be conducting pre-attack surveillance may not be enough to cause concern, multiple observations of or interactions with the same person engaged in the same suspicious behavior by different members of an organization's staff or of the Security team may well demonstrate a pattern of surveillance that must be addressed. If staff members do not have an effective way to report suspicious activity, or if there is no ongoing analysis of these reports vital clues that might have prevented a shooting could be missed.

- The presence of visible and competent Security professionals. The one thing that portrays a worse security posture than seeing no Security presence at a location is the presence of stereotypical "security guard" in an ill-fitting and unkempt uniform who is sleeping, reading, texting on their phone, or simply doesn't appear alert and ready to respond.

These are all elements that should be fundamental to our security programs and work generally to suppress crime, but the added benefit of potentially deterring a shooting during the planning phase reinforces the importance of the basic elements of an effective security program.