

Have a Seat

A first tactical approach?

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I know that a lot of cops instinctively use this common-sense first approach in just about any lawful encounter on the street, so it's certainly no secret. Then, again, if the TV show *Cops* is any indication of reality, a lot of cops don't.

For most of our "clients," simple command presence (showing up looking sharp and exuding confidence) gains their compliance. But we also know, for that small percent of knuckleheads, it can take more than presence to get the job done.

All good street cops possess a sixth sense when encountering dangerous people. It's what some call "that tingling sensation on the back of your neck." Although it sounds like magic, I think our sixth sense comes from down-to-earth, common-sense observations instead. For example, when we contact that suspicious guy on a bicycle at 0400 hours: Is this guy bigger than me? Pissed off? Nervous? Under the influence? Shaved head? Tatted up? We all know the drill.

If the answer to one or more of those questions is "yes," we also know it's time to be extra careful. In situations like these, I'd also like to suggest that your next step be the verbal request, "Hop off the bike, sir, and have a seat on the curb, please. Stretch your legs straight out, cross your ankles and put your hands on your lap."

In other words, you're using the request, "have a seat," as your first tactical approach—as a way to quickly size-up your opponent before getting any closer.

The Advantages

First, if your contact is non-compliant, you'll know right away. He isn't going to sit down. You'll learn this helpful tidbit while they're still, hopefully, at a safer distance. This buys you time to prepare in the event things get taken up a notch to radio for back-up, to increase your distance and so on.

Second, if they do comply, your tactical advantage increases. Once seated, should your suspect decide to run or fight, you can see his body prepare to do so. He's got to tuck in those legs, stand up, close the distance and square off before throwing the first punch. If he goes for a weapon in a pocket or the waistband, his hands come



Having your subject sit on the curb provides a tremendous tactical advantage. For even better results, have the person extend their legs and place their hands in front of them. Photo Dale Stockton

off his lap, and he'll most likely have to twist his body to retrieve or try to use it. Again, you've bought yourself some time.

Third, you gain a psychological advantage. There's a reason why some bosses make sure their chair keeps them taller than the employee sitting across the desk. No matter how big or tall your suspect is, while seated, he's looking up at you signaling, even if subtly, that you're the one in charge here.

If a pat down makes sense—legally and per your policy—with his legs stretched forward and ankles crossed, you can have your seated suspect place his hands behind his back before you lock those hands into a control hold. You can then stand your suspect up for the pat down while maximizing your control. For an arrest, I'll also handcuff seated suspects in this position. The leverage obtained is remarkable.

I'm sure there are other advantages to this approach, not the least of which is keeping their hands in your continuous sight. And even if these advantages are minimal, I believe the resulting benefits to your safety are well worth it.

Specific Cases

In inclement weather, how about “have a seat” on the bumper of a car? In those rare instances where there are no curbs, a nearby low wall will suffice or a parking stop or even seated on a lawn (providing an added benefit when they're distracted by ants).

For the parolee contact, you can be more specific: “Stretch out your legs and cross your right foot over your left.” When they get it wrong, (and you know they will, if only just to test you) correct them. Again, another subtle but clear signal you're in charge.

FTOs, how about having your trainees give this a try—on both the giving and receiving end? Your trainee can role-play the suspect—trying to run or attack from a seated position—and if you're still young at heart, you can role-play the suspect for your trainee. Supervisors, how about suggesting this as an option to your troops in the field? Like me, I'm sure you too want to see them go home safe at EOW.

Conclusion

I now use this simple technique during almost all my detainee contacts as long as it's within my department's policy and procedures and circumstances permitting. From possible DUIs to suspicious persons and fights now—before anything else, it's “have a seat!”

And, while you're at it, don't forget to use your “big boy” or “big girl” voice. Other than from those who wish me harm, I've received no complaints.

Note: I've gendered the possible bad actors as “he” only for the sake of simplicity. If that appears sexist, my apologies to female criminals everywhere.