Profiling Random Actors and Averting Campus Incidents

By Dan Korem

Behavioral profiling expert and the author of a new book *Rage of the Random Actor— Disarming Catastrophic Acts and Restoring Lives* Dan Korem warned attendees of the General Session at IACLEA's 47th Annual Conference in Kansas City, Kansas last year that student-led suicide attacks were imminent. He added that campuses in the statistically safest communities—small towns and suburbs—are the highest risk targets for mass shooting/bombings and suicide attacks committed by students and staff.

Ninety-seven days after his presentation, on October 1, a University of Oklahoma student became the first U.S. college student suicide bomber in the precise locale he predicted—a statistically safe small town community. And the student had the Random Actor profile. Thankfully, only the student died.

Korem's twenty-plus years of research identifies that most mass school shooters, suicide attackers, and postal/company shooters have the Random Actor profile (originally identified and published in his 1997 book *The Art of Profiling—Reading People Right the First Time*). The following questions and answers about the Random Actor profile and preventing campus incidents are adapted from *Rage of the Random Actor.*

What exactly is the Random Actor profile?

People with the extreme Random Actor profile possess two core behavioral traits. The first trait is the high FEARFUL trait— they make *decisions* out of extreme fear

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(paranoia). Their paranoia might manifest itself in a diagnosable condition, like schizophrenia, or a person might have paranoia with a "small p"—despondent, sense of hopelessness, etc. It is from this trait that their neuroticism and irrational acts arise. They will do whatever is necessary to protect assets against real or imagined threats to their personal identity and what they want. They may *talk* confidently, but when called upon to make daily decisions, they operate out of extreme fear. Their second trait is the preference to operate unconventionally or out-of-the-box to the extreme—what is called the *UNPREDICTABLE* trait. It doesn't mean this person is hard to predict, rather that they prefer to operate outside of convention. This trait by itself isn't harmful. Bill Gates, for example,

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possesses this trait and positively applied it to build a software empire. Random Actors, however, possess the dark side of this trait: anarchistic and reckless.

How difficult is it to identify someone with the Random Actor Traits?

Random Actors who kill always display the two traits *to the extreme*, and there is always a behavioral paper trail. We have trained over 20,000 education and law enforcement professionals and there has never even been a letter of complaint in application where someone was misidentified. In 2002, a major university had over 24 bomb threats, several which were not pranks.

How does the Random Actor profile relate to college and university campuses?

Virtually every secondary or collegiate school shooter/bomber since 1997 had the Random Actor profile, from the 1999 Columbine attackers . . . to Al Joseph DeGuzman (21) at DeAnza College who was caught in January 2001 with a cache of bombs . . . to Robert Flores (41) who murdered three professors in 2002 at the University of Arizona College of Nursing. Additionally, up to 50 to 75 times a day, secondary school campus students across the United States are found with bombs, weapons, and plots to take out their schools. As students graduate, a portion of this threat potential transfers to college and university campuses.

How likely is it that colleges will continue to experience these incidents?

Like other education institutions, the number of threats has significantly increased every year since the mid-1990s. In 1997, the first mass school shooting that established the school shooting/bombing trend occurred in the Jackson, Mississippi suburb of Pearl where three died and seven were wounded. The ring leader was an 18-year-old college student who recruited local teens at a high school, and one of the teens carried out the school slayings, including his mother. In the future, look for recruitment by domestic and international terrorist groups to commit suicide attacks, as well as killer cells like the "DC Sniper." Behaviorally, Random Actors when cornered often commit suicide and most U.S. mass school shooters planned to commit suicide as a part of their attack.
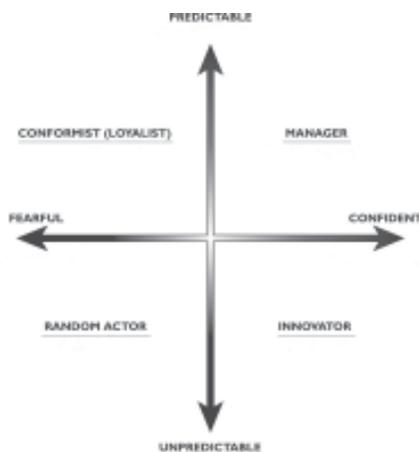
Why do you emphasize that higher education security should stay in touch with their secondary school counterparts?

Because we expect to see more recruitment of high school students to commit Random Actor incidents by college and university students. It gives an insecure student a false sense of power to have younger ones in his cadre . . . and they are easy to deceive and direct to commit an attack.

Your research indicates that suburbs and small towns are the most likely locale for a Random Actor incident. This seems odd because they are the statistically safest locales.

First, virtually every mass school shooting in North America and Europe since 1997 has occurred in suburbs and small towns. Rarely is there a similar type of incident in the inner-city. Second, suburbs and small towns have the *opposite* behavioral profile in the eyes of a Random Actor. If you look at a chart of the Random Actor traits you can see that suburbs and small towns have the MANAGER profile. In suburbs there is the predictability of neatly cut lawns and immaculate malls, and people are affluent, feel safe and are confident. This is why the Muhammad-

Malvo sniper duo took aim on the Washington, DC and Maryland suburbs. Small towns also represent the MANAGER quadrant, but for different reasons. First, there is little change and variety. Second, people feel safe and confident, don't lock their doors, and Random Actors suspiciously feel excluded from their community.

How does this correlate with suicide terrorists?

First, the average age of a suicide attacker for the last twenty years is 17–24 and students are the preferred recruit. Second, most suicide attackers are affluent and educated. In February 2003, for example, I warned British industry leaders that they must keep a watch on their suburban teenagers—not their lower income areas. Two of the July 6, 2005, London subway suicide attackers were suburban teenagers and a third was just 22 and known to be immature. The recruiter of the cell was educated, a youth mentor, and even featured in a *Times of London* magazine piece. All four—like our U.S. school shooters and most Palestinian suicide attackers—had the Random Actor profile.

Who really ticks off the Random Actor?

In the early 1990s, I asked the question: *Why are there random shooters at the US Post Office but not at UPS or FedEx? They all are in the delivery business.* If you look at the grid of the Random Actor traits, you see that the *MANAGER* quad-

rant is the **opposite** behavioral profile. People, organizations, institutions, and communities that represent the two MANAGER traits inherently tick-off the Random Actor. If you appear predictable/conventional/traditional and you have the façade of confidence, these are the opposite traits of the Random Actor and you are a higher at risk for an incident.

In the postal example, the Post Office, which has 850,000 employees, represents extreme *predictability*. And, when combined with arrogant and dismissive management styles, you have the recipe for disaster—and over 36 slayings. UPS and FedEx, which employ over 500,000 staff, historically have had more change and variability, more inclusive and responsive management styles. The net result? Only 1 shooting.

Similarly, most company shootings occur in the accounting department or assembly line *but not the art department.* In local communities, alternative education schools, which by definition educate at-risk students, rarely if ever have authentic bomb or mass shooting threats *directed at them by their students.* After 9-11, for example, while nearly 10,000 North American schools experienced threats, there were virtually no threats on alternative campuses. In effect, they were the safest education locales. Without knowing it, they were intuitively applying a three-point intervention strategy that I identified in the mid-1990s.

Where should campuses pay closest attention where staff might commit Random Actor incidents?

Anyplace that has repetitive work tasks, like accounting, delivery, mail room, etc. These types of locales are where most Random Actor workplace incidents occur.

What campuses are at highest risk for a student or staff Random Actor incident?

Campuses that have the two MANAGER traits and are in suburbs and small towns.

Have you used this predictive grid?

Yes. In August of 2002, I made a list of 35 "high risk" campuses and systems and called senior officials and informed them of the threat assessment. Within 6 weeks,

First U.S. College Student Suicide Bomber
Matches Random Actor Profile

On Saturday evening, October 1, 2005, Joel Hinrichs III, a 21-year-old engineering student at the University of Oklahoma became America's first student suicide bomber. Strapped to an explosive device, he committed suicide by detonating the device about 100 yards from the university football stadium about 10 minutes before the half-time of the game in progress. (He apparently tried to enter the stadium but was turned back when he wouldn't allow his bag to be inspected.) Fans could not exit stadium at half-time. A cache of explosives was found in his apartment near campus, and he attempted to purchase ammonium nitrate to make a fertilizer bomb, like the one used by Timothy McVeigh.

A prized student from Colorado Springs, Hinrichs had the Random Actor traits and other common attributes of students who have committed Random Actor attacks:

1. (**High Fearful trait**) Suffered severe despondency. Hinrichs's father said, "He was a very intelligent, very private individual who somehow lost the confidence that his life would be a good one."
2. (**High Unpredictable trait**) Described as "different," obsessed with guns and ammunition. It may never be known if he only decided to commit suicide or his device prematurely detonated before he could maneuver next to others. The nature of the act, though, was extremely UNPREDICTABLE.
3. Parents were going through a divorce
4. Affluent and educated
5. Intellectually bright

University of Oklahoma as a campus represents the MANAGER quadrant:

1. Small town environment
2. State school
3. Statistically safe
4. Extremely traditional environment

Hinrichs was like Finland's first suicide bomber college student

Petri Gerdt, a twenty-one-year-old chemistry student, became the world's first student suicide bomber without a cause. On October 11, 2002, he strapped 20 pounds of explosives to his body and blew himself up in an affluent suburban Helsinki mall. Finland, while statistically safe, has all the attributes as a country of the MANAGER quadrant *and* it has one of the world's highest suicide rates per capita. Similar to Hinrichs, both were affluent and extremely bright. It won't be long before terrorist or criminal cells recruit these students and give them a cause to make it easier for them to detonate.

Should families send their kids to University of Oklahoma?

That the University of Oklahoma represents the MANAGER quadrant to the Random Actor doesn't mean that families shouldn't send their sons and daughters to this outstanding educational institution. Rather, campuses that are regarded as the MANAGER quadrant by Random Actors should have staff in strategic places who can identify the Random Actor traits and how to apply the three-point intervention. Like other student Random Actor cases, Hinrichs was known by campus professionals to have problems, yet none could connect the dots regarding the significance of what they observed as it related to the Random Actor traits and the threat potential.

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one of those campuses, the University of Arizona, Tucson had the first mass shooting of the 2002-2003 school year. Within 3 months, another one of the 35 campuses had the first student arrested who wanted to be a suicide bomber (University of Texas at Arlington, Feb. 2003). A third campus had the first U.S. college student suicide bomber (University of Oklahoma, October 1, 2005).

What are the three intervention themes you've identified that stop incidents and how can campuses apply them to stop attacks and guide a student or staff member out of the Random Actor profile?

Theme 1: Provide change and variability. This accommodates the UNPREDICTABLE trait through more flexibility, avoiding autocratic directives, etc.

After 9-11, the only region in the United States that did not experience Random Actor threats in schools was a region where over 2,500 educators applied these strategies.

Theme 2: Provide protective factors. This reduces paranoia, an us-against-them mentality. Examples are sensible responses to students being bullied or picked on; counseling for students facing sudden reversals/failures, etc.; promote inclusiveness especially amongst staff and student leadership directed at the student body.

Theme 3: Mentor how to make confident decisions outside area of expertise/giftedness. This not only reduces fearful decision making, but over time a student/staff moves out of the Random Actor profile and into the Innovator profile. The idea is to help someone in small bite-sized steps learn to make decisions out of confidence and most will respond literally within weeks.

Where have these interventions produced results?

After 9-11, the only region in the United States that *did not* experience Random

Actor threats in schools was a region where over 2,500 educators applied these strategies. In addition to hundreds of small individual cases, it has been used in combat. Captain Pedro Rosario and his unit made over fifty arrests of suicidal-led insurgents over a period of several months in 2004 and without firing a shot. He was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor for his service. In effect, he not only saved the lives of Iraqis and his troops, but also those who he said, "wanted to kill and be killed." And, most of his arrests were those who were young, affluent, and educated from other countries outside of Iraq.

Who on a campus is best suited to apply these interventions?

What community colleges have going for them is that they are responsive to their communities. They also have a threat potential, though, because it's more likely that a local community college student might recruit secondary schools students, which is why the two institutions should work together to lower the potential for incidents. On campus, staff and students that can apply the three interventions include:

> Department heads
>   (who can guide staff)
> Student assisted services
> Career counselors
> RAs when there are dorms
> Student leadership
> Campus security
> Human resource professionals
> Senior management

Is there another useful perspective campus security should consider?

Staff must be able to distinguish between protest groups that commit non-lethal incidents (like vandalism) and Random Actors in a group who might kill. Just because someone commits a criminal act during a protest doesn't make them a Random Actor.

About the Author

Dan Korem, also the author of The Art of Profiling—Reading People Right the First Time, *is the president of Korem & Associates, which has provided behavioral profile training to over 25,000 professionals—more than any firm in the world—for education, law enforcement, military, leadership, sales, and human resource applications. You can read the first two chapters of* Rage of the Random Actor *at: www.ipfinc.com.*