

**THE POLICE
HOW-TO
GUIDES**

**HOW TO IMPROVE BACK-UP
FOR UNDERCOVER UNITS**

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HOW TO IMPROVE BACK-UP FOR UNDERCOVER UNITS

These methods will help SWAT officers and undercover agents improve coordination when dealing with higher-risk violators

Serving as an undercover (UC) operative or a SWAT officer are arguably two of the most potentially dangerous and rewarding occupations in law enforcement.

In my law enforcement career, I worked undercover when I volunteered to work in a covert capacity while serving as a police officer and U.S. customs agent. From this well of experience, I drafted an 84-page training program called Lifeline Training to help train undercover agents while also being used to cross-train UC and tactical personnel.

In the program, I recommend cross-training (cross pollination) of tactical and undercover personnel, because a UC agent would be less likely to get themselves into certain situations if they knew how difficult it is to execute a tactical operation required to rescue them.

Even though the average UC agent has common sense, other UC operatives are overly concerned about saying "no" to violators. Some UC agents are worried about blowing the deal, so they give in when they should be just as demanding as the dirt bags they're dealing with.

There's no rule among criminals that says if you don't do everything they demand or ask you're automatically assumed to be a cop. In fact, I've found that bad guys will actually respect you more when you act firm, professional, business-like and smart, especially about your security. Meeting on neutral turf means totally neutral grounds—not inside the passenger seat of a car with one bad guy behind the wheel and another bad guy sitting behind you in the back seat.

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Unless an undercover operative was once a member of a highly trained tactical team, they wouldn't be familiar with SWAT operations. I worked undercover as a hit man, gun runner and smuggler on multi-thousand-kilogram "controlled delivery" cocaine cases, and I know from experience that having quality back-up is critical to your long-term survival.

To understand the complexities of mounting a take-down operation such as rescuing an undercover agent from a secure location under the control of armed violators, undercover agents must be trained as a SWAT operator. There's no in-between here.

Once a UC agent is trained to execute take-downs and rescue operations, I believe they'll think tactically and will be inclined not to put themselves in certain situations. UC personnel who receive SWAT-style training will also know how to act if they're in a dangerous situation and must be taken into custody with violators or rescued from harm's way. Having photographs of the UC operative and meeting with the UC operative in advance to work out take-down signals and a rescue plan should be standard operating procedure for all medium to high-risk UC operations.

It's also important to cross-train SWAT personnel in undercover operations, so tactical officers can appreciate what the UC operative is going through when they meet with violators and subjects of an investigation. An undercover agent may be inside an air-conditioned bar or restaurant on a hot summer day, while their back-up team is outside for an hour. This isn't always as much fun as you would imagine.

SWAT cops are usually the personnel who are the most heavily armed, best trained and physically fit. Undercover agents usually carry the lowest quotient of firepower, don't have time to exercise as often as they should, dress like bad guys and tend to possess the supreme confidence that allows them to be good at what they do.

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Undercover and SWAT personnel arrive from different ends of the law enforcement spectrum, and when they meet on-duty usually take down higher-risk violators. In one worst-case scenario, a tactical team could be called in to rescue a UC agent who has been taken hostage or isn't allowed to leave a secure location until the deal does down to the satisfaction of the bad guys.

If an undercover agent gets trapped inside a car or building with armed violators, the agent needs to know how to conduct himself when a SWAT team takes down the violators to rescue the UC agent. For example, UC agents should be trained that when they hear a certain siren sound in the neighborhood, they'll know in advance that in ten seconds a SWAT team will execute a dynamic breaching operation.

After a take-down signal is given, UC personnel should know to assume a certain position, so they will be quickly identified as a Member of the Force (MOF) by the raiding party. Planning in advance to wear clothing of a certain color clothing can also help identify a UC operative during an urgent operation.

When undercover agents need officers to provide backup, too often supervisors sweep the office for warm bodies to serve on a cover team that provides support for a UC operation. The time has come to improve the level of back-up by having SWAT cops, including some in civilian clothes, to serve as members of a back-up team. The time has also come to train undercover agents as SWAT operators to help them improve their capabilities with firearms and tactics.