



**By Richard Kay**

The most important elements of an officer's operational safety toolkit are strong command presence, a positive mindset, excellent communication skills and well-developed operational awareness. The combination of these four attributes means an officer can resolve most situations safely and with minimal force. However, to be truly effective and confident in the operational environment, officers must have well-rounded skills and tactics at all levels of possible response.

A key skill that many officers do not properly understand is compliance holds. This 'level' of officer response creates a greater challenge than other response options, as officers must be at close 'contact' range with a resisting subject to apply them, thereby increasing risk, and compliance techniques can often be difficult to learn and master. Also, the application of compliance holds requires a sound understanding of when they can be used lawfully, including

# Compliance Techniques: Hands-on Resistance Control

lawful force application and arrest theory, since a compliance hold deprives a person of their liberty and therefore affects an arrest.

How many crowd controllers working at licensed venues, entertainment or sporting events have used compliance holds on people to remove them from the premises and never realised that they have made an arrest, only to 'release' the arrest once the person has been ejected? Failure to understand the lawful requirements of arrest, including finds committing (before) and reasons for lawful detainment (after), as well as using appropriate lawful force during the application of a compliance hold, can leave a security operative open to legal process after the fact.

The fear that prevents some people from relinquishing control is the fear of being dominated. Some people unconsciously hold the belief that a person who dominates is the winner and a person who is dominated is the loser. When this kind of polarisation occurs, there will be conflict, because no one wants to feel like a loser in any exchange with someone else. Officers need to move beyond this win/lose mentality, and understand that an officer has no choice but to control the situation.

It is important to keep in mind that conflict has a positive aspect. Each conflict has the potential to be a valuable lesson in human dynamics. With each interaction, officers have the chance to look inside themselves and ask, "What issues did I bring into this confrontation? How did I get involved in this incident?" These questions are asked not to blame, but to help understand the

dynamics and work toward a resolution of these issues. Officers should always self-analyse in order to learn from each experience as well as accept responsibility for their actions during a confrontation.

To understand and harmonise, officers should consider all the factors that go beyond the mere act of controlling the conduct of others. Officers should empathise to formulate a clear picture so they can get compliance with the least amount of effort. Conflict control starts with the presence of the officers and often can be resolved without the use of force. However, verbalising may not lead to compliance and other alternatives should be explored.

Officers need to learn compliance holds to handle those who go beyond verbal control. Although compliance holds do not work on everyone, they provide an avenue for the escalation of force. Techniques are not easily learned because many officers do not understand the theory of how they work, and therefore struggle to master the technique.

Compliance holds require the manipulation of anatomical structure and use of the whole body. Concentration plays a part of the effectiveness of the application, as well as a sense of the subject's pending action – i.e. knowing when to move before the subject does increases the chance of success. Positioning and awareness are components of successful techniques. Before applying a hold, officers should have an idea of what they wish to accomplish through this action, and include good verbal skills. When involved in an incident, officers may have an



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audience. Good verbal skills to give directions help insulate the officer's actions from possible legal backlash when using compliance holds.

Once applied, a compliance hold becomes the basis for giving direction. When the subject complies, the pressure must be reduced. This is the principle of motivation (reward vs. penalty): resistance = increased pain (penalty); compliance = decreased pain (reward). Releasing the pressure rewards the subject after completing the request, and is a crucial factor in satisfying lawful force requirements.

Officers should never use a control hold to punish a subject. The purpose for officers to use compliance holds is to get the subject to comply without escalating to a higher level of force. Sometimes officers have a tendency to continue to apply a compliance hold when it is not working. When officers find this occurring, they must disengage and attempt another form of control or escalate to a higher level of force to get compliance.

Physiological makeup is a factor when using compliance holds. A person who is in good health and physically fit is not always a good subject for a compliance hold, as they often have a higher pain tolerance. The body structure of a person and their flexibility may have a direct relationship to the resistance to compliance holds. Also, some people just have a higher threshold for pain than others.

Psychological factors are an unpredictable element in compliance holds. The mind can trigger emotional responses that can affect how an individual will react to compliance techniques. Anger and hostility creates unpredictable responses to compliance holds and can inflict pain. Mental illness is often the highest resistance to attempts to apply compliance holds. Psychologically 'passive' and 'aggressive' personality types produce individuals resistant to pain. Attempts to control these people should be dealt with caution; often a higher level of force may be necessary to gain control.

People who are goal-orientated and refuse to show pain outwardly by using mental resistance provide another group who are difficult to handle with compliance holds. The longer they resist, the more pressure the officer applies thinking the subject is about to comply, sometimes resulting in fractures of the arms or wrists when an officer applies too much pressure. Intoxicated people create another set of problems, since drugs or

alcohol affect their pain response.

Other aspects that influence compliance holds are size factors between the officer and the resisting person. The training that results in the proper application of the hold may be a factor if the officer is not applying pressure correctly. The officer's survival attitude may be a direct relationship toward the outcome. Officers have been known to freeze in motion when involved in a high stress situation. Others panic and lose control of the incident through the lack of self-confidence. Worse yet, officers have just given up.

There are some important principles to consider when applying compliance holds:

#### **Balance**

It is important to maintain balance and not over extend. The rule for balance is head over hips over feet. Lower your centre of gravity and keep your knees flexed. Finally, always bring your movements to the centre of your body so you can employ full body power. Do not attempt control holds with just the arms, as this leaves the officer relying on strength.

#### **Mobility**

Officers should keep mobile when trying to lock up a control hold. Do not be afraid to move around and set the hold in a different position. Keep the subject off balance and unsteady. When a subject is off balance, they cannot move or use power effectively, which limits their resistance capability. Without a strong stance, the subject cannot get into as strong of a position.

#### **Non-Resistance**

Avoid a direct collision of forces. Strength against strength results in the strongest person winning. Redirect the subject's energy up or down, left or right. It is difficult to stop forward motion, but is easy to redirect it. Remember the Push-Pull theory – if the subject pulls you push, if the subject pushes you pull. Use small circles in the application of compliance holds, as they take less time and effort to apply. Also, the body does not compensate well for rotational force or forces in two to three directions at once.

#### **Distraction**

Distraction techniques can be used to weaken mental resistance. Lead the mind as well as the

body. Interrupt the concentration of the subject to get a psychological advantage.

### Control and Sensitivity

Pressure should be applied to a compliance hold gradually. Too fast in application passes the threshold of pain before you are aware. Maintain even pressure until compliance is achieved. Watch for indicators that the pain is getting more intense – loud verbalisation from the subject, standing on their toes, feet ‘flapping’ (ground control), etc. The reaction may depend on the hold that you are applying. Accompany the pressure with strong and clear verbal commands to gain compliance. Once control is accomplished, reduce the pressure.

### Transitional Flow

Use transitional flow to go from one position to another or from one technique to another. Remember, if the technique is not working you can either escalate or release the hold, but do

not keep trying the same technique when it is not working.

### Factors to consider:

- Understand the structure and function of the muscular and skeletal systems.
- Extend the limb away from the subject’s body before applying compliance hold.
- Extending and/or rotating a joint will release it.
- Bending and/or twisting the wrist will weaken the grip.
- It is easier to drop the elbow rather than raise the hand.
- Relaxation eases the pain.
- Before a person can raise from a prone position, they must lift their head first.

Compliance holds are less effective if the subject is aggressive. Escalation to a higher level of force may be necessary. The most difficult part of a compliance hold is getting close to the subject and establishing the hold. If the person is

aggressive, it increases the risk of safety to the officer. Always maintain the ability to escalate or disengage, as techniques that ‘tie’ the officer to the subject are not recommended. Officers should never jeopardise safety to accomplish their goal.

Control holds do not work on everyone, and can be hard to apply under stress. Officers should adopt holds that are comfortable to them, and practice regularly to perfect skills. Good verbalisation, proper technique, a positive mindset, and the ability to recognise when to escalate or de-escalate, make good combinations for controlling behaviour and gaining compliance.

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