

# Verbal De-Escalation: Kind Words Keep the Peace



The protest season is once again upon us, and in a year of unprecedented value increases, people might be upset before they even come into the building.

Now a new training tool is available to help those who deal with the public.

Chief of Security Glen Reed is teaching a popular course called “Surviving Verbal Conflict.”

Several sessions have already been conducted and have quickly filled up.

“There was a need for this training for preparing our organization to handle the challenges of dealing with the public,” Reed says. “It is no surprise that people tend to become very emotional when it comes to their money.”

After spending 22 years in corrections and law enforcement, Reed has learned the art of what he calls ‘conversational persuasion.’

“Verbal de-escalation is a great tool for surviving verbal conflict when encountering argumentative and manipulative people. As professionals we must learn to mitigate problematic behaviors rather than escalate them,” he said.

Lesson number one: it’s not personal. People are angry at their situation, not at the individual.

With the help of his safety supervisor, Lieutenant Steve Rochon, and Jack Barnett, chief communications officer, Reed teaches techniques of persuasion; how to use deflective phrases, how to control the narrative during a conflict, and most importantly, how to listen. He encourages empathy.

“Try to see the situation through another person’s eyes; paraphrase your understanding of what they’re saying to show you’re actively listening; find common ground. Everyone wants dignity and respect; it’s a universal truth,” he says.



Reed’s class is getting the attention of the Bexar Appraisal District and the Texas Municipal League (TML).

Manuel Trejo from the TML came to observe one of the March classes because the state just mandated verbal de-escalation training for all police and first responders and he wanted to see how HCAD was doing it.

He was impressed with the class and afterwards said, “This is great what you are doing here.”

The skills that are being taught can be used in all walks of life, though Reed laughingly admits his wife isn’t happy when he employs them at home to keep domestic peace!

Reed says he will continue to offer the classes along with refresher courses.

“I hope that the training empowers employees by giving them confidence,” he said. “The employees have learned a set of skills that they can immediately apply to their professional and personal lives.”

However, he cautions that “verbal de-escalation is a perishable skill; you have to practice it.”