



TPOP
WEBINAR FIELD GUIDE

KEEP CONTROL WHEN CUSTOMERS ESCALATE:

PRACTICAL DE-ESCALATION FOR RESTAURANT TEAMS

Practical strategies and a repeatable framework for protecting employees, calming tense interactions, and managing conflict before it becomes violence.



CONTROL THE FIRST SECONDS

Use a two-second pause to lower the temperature before the conflict takes control.



APPLY C.A.L.M.™ UNDER PRESSURE

Check for safety. Act with control. Listen with empathy. Manage the outcome.



CREATE A CONSISTENT HANDOFF

Give every employee clear permission to disengage—and every manager a defined response.



About This Field Guide

This guide is the written record of a live webinar presented by The Power of Preparedness (TPOP) on August 20, 2026. It is built to be used rather than filed. Most de-escalation material tells a crew to stay calm and stops there; this one explains why that instruction fails on a Friday night, and replaces it with a two-second pause a nineteen-year-old can actually use with a guest in their face. Operators get the cost case for funding a program and the six things that separate training that changes behavior from training that only gets completed. Managers get a handoff rule, a three-minute debrief, and a pre-shift topic they can run this week.

■ The Power of Preparedness (TPOP)

A national leader in workplace-violence prevention training, trusted by restaurant, grocery, and hospitality brands large and small — roughly a million people trained a year. Its scenario-based micro-lessons turn readiness into instinct across food service, retail, healthcare, manufacturing, and hospitality.

Learn more at thepowerofpreparedness.com

YOUR PRESENTER



Dan Stechow

President & CEO, TPOP

Presented the session and led the discussion on de-escalation in quick-service restaurants. Believes education, creativity, and technology can change behavior at scale.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read it once end to end, then use it in pieces. The four C.A.L.M. pages are written to be pulled out one letter at a time as a five-minute pre-shift topic — four weeks covers the framework, then start again. The four obstacles work as a coaching tool: when an interaction goes badly, name which one was in play rather than repeating the training. The handoff and debrief pages are for managers. The closing page is for whoever owns the training budget.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- **Part 1** Why De-Escalation Matters in QSRs
- **Part 2** Understanding Escalation and De-Escalation
- **Part 3** What Stops Staff From Applying the Training
- **Part 4** The C.A.L.M. Response Framework
- **Part 5** The Handoff to a Manager
- **Part 6** Building a Program That Transfers
- **Close** Take-Aways, the Reframe, and Q&A Highlights

DISCLAIMER

This field guide is provided for general informational and educational purposes only and does not constitute legal, security, insurance, or professional advice. It summarizes a live training session and reflects the views of the presenter. Organizations should consult qualified professionals when developing violence-prevention, safety, or emergency-response policies. De-escalation techniques reduce risk; they do not eliminate it, and no technique should be attempted where an employee's personal safety is at stake.

WHY IT MATTERS

What an Untrained Staff Actually Costs

Training is not a cost center. It is turnover control and brand protection.

Start with how common this is. In 2026, 42% of frontline hospitality workers reported a customer incident in the previous 30 days, and 64% of restaurant workers say they have experienced workplace violence at some point in their career. The figure that should land hardest is the third one: one in three say their employer treats customer aggression as just part of the job. That posture has a price, and the bill arrives in two waves — the operating costs you feel immediately, and the insurance, legal, and lost-time costs that land months later and get tracked by your CFO and your broker.



What It Costs	The Number Behind It
Turnover	~144% a year in the QSR sector — the crew you train in March is gone by fall.
Replacement	\$5,900+ to replace one hourly employee. Treat that as a floor, not a ceiling.
One bad night	One night is all it takes for a good crew member to decide the job isn't worth it.
Brand exposure	90 seconds of phone video is now a brand event, not a store event.
Insurance	\$43,100 average workers' comp severity for an assault claim sustained in the act of a crime, against a \$24,378 all-cause average. Claims history drives your experience mod for years.
Legal	\$165,514 is OSHA's maximum penalty for a willful or repeat violation; a serious violation runs \$16,550. OSHA has cited non-healthcare retailers under the General Duty Clause.
Lost time	7 days median time away from work per workplace-violence injury — 13 days when it converts to restricted duty.

PART 1

Why De-Escalation Matters in QSRs

"It's not a rare-event problem. Violence is up all around us — it's an angrier world, and Lord knows it's probably going to get angrier over the months ahead."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Everyone in Your Restaurant Is at Risk

Violence does not discriminate.



- **Conflict can occur in any role**
Counter, drive-thru, kitchen, dining room.
- **The brand rides on every shift**
Guests do not separate crew from company.
- **Not limited to management or security**
The first person facing the guest is rarely a manager.
- **Consistency improves outcomes**
One standard, applied by everyone.

Whoever is standing at the register when trouble starts is the person who sets the tone for what follows, and that is rarely the most senior person in the building. A program aimed only at shift leads leaves the most exposed people the least prepared — and by the arithmetic on the deck, it produces four untrained people on every shift.

"It doesn't matter if you're the boss or the newbie. Conflict can happen to anybody, any role — and every employee represents the brand."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Your Crew Already Knows They Should Stay Calm

So why doesn't it work?



- **Every program teaches the same principles**
The content is not the differentiator.
- **Almost none change what happens at the window**
Completion is not behavior.
- **'Just stay calm' is an instruction, not a skill**
It gives them nothing to do.
- **The gap is psychological, not informational**
The obstacle is not what they know. It is what happens before they can use it.

This is the honest starting point for the whole session. Tell a crew they should stay calm when someone yells at them and every one of them will agree with you — and there will still be incidents on Friday night. Every de-escalation program in the industry teaches the same principles, and almost none of them change what actually happens at the window. Understanding why is the difference between a completed module and a changed behavior.

You Cannot Manage What You Do Not Count

Ask how many stores had an incident last month, and most operators cannot answer.

- **'We don't track it' usually wins the poll**
And it is not a wrong answer.
- **A pattern you never logged is still a pattern**
It just becomes someone else's exhibit.
- **Most QSRs only record physical incidents**
Verbal-only incidents vanish.
- **Pattern data is what funds next year**
And what protects you in litigation.

Early in the session Dan put a question to the room — explicitly not a poll, just something to get people thinking: over the last month, how many of your stores had an incident that required a manager to step in? Most operators cannot answer it, and the session's own opening poll bore that out — 'we don't track it' was the most common response. That matters twice over: you cannot show a program worked without a baseline, and prior incidents are precisely what unlock the insurance, legal, and lost-time exposure on the previous page.

PART 2

Understanding Escalation and De-Escalation

"Whoever is the calmest sets the temperature."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Human Emotions are Highly Contagious

Whoever is calmest sets the temperature.



- **Emotions transfer in under one second**

Faster than either person decides anything.

- **Neither party chooses the register**

It is set before the conversation starts.

- **Volume, pace, and posture do the talking**

The other person mirrors them automatically.

- **Whoever gets there first owns it**

Which can be your employee.

Emotional contagion is the mechanism underneath everything else in this guide. Signals get copied in well under a second, long before either party has decided anything at all. You see it everywhere: one person laughs and the group laughs, one person walks into a room tense and the whole room shifts. In a restaurant it means the emotional register of the exchange is being set long before anyone gets to the actual problem.

"Human emotions are contagious — they transfer in under one second. A raised voice, fast speech, tight posture, and the other person mirrors it before either of them decides what to do next."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Calm Is Contagious, Too

The pendulum swings both ways.



- **Calm transfers exactly the same way**
Same mechanism, opposite direction.
- **Lower volume, slower pace, open hands**
Three things anyone can do deliberately.
- **The reflex works in your favor**
If you go first.
- **This is the entire leverage point**
One person refuses to climb.

Composure is just as transmissible as anger. Lower the volume, slow the pace, keep the hands open, and the mirroring reflex starts working for the employee instead of against them — provided they go first. Going first is the whole move.

Understanding Agitation

Irate people cannot think clearly.



- **A heightened emotional state**
The body is ahead of the reasoning.
- **Reduced ability to think clearly**
Logic lands badly right now.
- **Feeling trapped or overwhelmed**
Perceived, not necessarily real.
- **Escalation builds on itself**
Each exchange raises the floor.

Somebody in that state has lost access to the part of the brain you are trying to reason with. It applies to the guest, the employee, and the manager alike — the presenter described losing his own composure with a rowdy group at a restaurant and ending up shouting in the parking lot. Nobody is exempt.

"When you lose your cool, you stop using your frontal cortex. You really get primitive on all of it. I was one of the irates in that one."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Understanding Empathy

Whether you agree with them or not, they have a right to feel however they feel.



- **Recognizing another person's feelings**

Naming it out loud is most of the work.

- **Helps reduce defensiveness**

It removes what they arrived braced against.

- **Does not require agreement**

Your opinion is not the point right now.

- **Builds connection and lowers tension**

Two people, one problem.

Empathy is the most misused word in this material, so it is worth boiling down: it does not matter whether you agree. Understanding that your opinion is not what governs how this person is reacting emotionally is the whole of it. The presenter reached for the story from Stephen Covey's Seven Habits — the man on the New York subway whose children were misbehaving in the car, who finally leaned over and apologized because they were coming home from the hospital where their mother had just passed away, which instantly changed the entire level of understanding as to the situation. Covey called it a paradigm shift.

"You really never know what someone else is going through at a particular moment. Sometimes people get the benefit of the doubt — you should at least listen and understand that they get to feel the way that they feel."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

PART 3

What Stops Staff From Applying the Training

"My mom used to say — and it was usually my fault — 'Count to ten, Barbara.' It wasn't until decades later, in training, that I understood that is de-escalation."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

The First Seconds

The critical window that sets the stage for the interaction.

- **0–2 seconds: they read you**

Face, posture, how fast you turn toward them. Your employee is being assessed before saying a word — and is assessing right back.

- **2–10 seconds: the tone locks in**

Whoever sets the emotional register first usually keeps it. If both react emotionally, the exchange accelerates and stops being about the order.

- **10 seconds and after: you're negotiating**

Past this point nobody is de-escalating. You are managing a position the customer has now taken publicly, in front of an audience.

- **That is not much runway**

Which is exactly why it has to be trained rather than left to instinct.

Confrontations are decided far earlier than people think. Research on thin-slice judgment shows we form durable impressions of each other within seconds of contact, long before content matters — and roughly three-quarters of what gets communicated in those seconds is non-verbal. Everything useful your crew can do happens inside the first ten seconds.

Your Crew Isn't Choosing to Escalate

The threat signal arrives before the thinking brain does.

- **The signal reaches the amygdala first**

Ahead of conscious thought.

- **Joseph LeDoux called it the brain's 'low road'**

The fast emotional pathway.

- **Daniel Goleman popularized it as the amygdala hijack**

Same phenomenon, different name.

- **The response begins before they catch up**

Nobody clocks in planning to fight.

The threat signal reaches the amygdala before it reaches the thinking brain, which means the physical response is already under way by the time the employee registers it. That single fact is why an instruction aimed at conscious choice cannot carry the load on its own — it is addressed to the part of the system that shows up second.

"Your staff are arriving late to their own reaction. Which is why 'just stay calm' is not training. It's a wish."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Obstacle 1 — Nature

'Monkey see, monkey do' still holds true for all human beings.



- **Escalation is a two-person activity**

Neither participant chose it.

- **Escalation is not a decision**

It's a reflex loop.

- **One person's tone fires the other's threat response**

That response reads as confirmation.

- **So both of them climb**

Unless one refuses the next rung.

The first obstacle is physiology, and it is the reason telling people to stay calm does not survive contact with a real guest. If someone yells in your face, the odds are you yell back — that is fight-or-flight, not a character flaw. The useful consequence is that the whole loop collapses the moment one party declines to answer in kind. It works the same whether it is two employees, two customers, or one of each.

"Nobody escalates alone — it takes two people to climb into it, which means the whole intervention is one person refusing to take the next rung."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Obstacle 2 — Nurture

What we were taught about conflict.



- **'Stand up for yourself'**
'Don't let people push you around.'
- **Those lessons shape interpretation**
Long before anyone was hired.
- **Conflict reads as a test of dignity or status**
Especially when someone raises their voice.
- **So it feels like something to be won**
Or at minimum defended.

The second obstacle is everything a person absorbed long before they ever put on the uniform, and it can be sharpened considerably by the culture or community they came from. Someone raised on don't-take-any-crap-from-anybody starts their first job with dukes already up. When a person feels threatened, the encounter registers as something to be won — and the real work here is redefining the victory condition. It is not who can be louder, and it is not who can pound their chest hardest.

Obstacle 3 — Acclimation

Accepting the new conflict environment.



- **Some entered a workforce where this was rare**

Open confrontation simply didn't happen.

- **Higher frustration, lower social restraint**

It can feel abnormal or unacceptable.

- **Frontline roles now involve it routinely**

Emotionally charged interactions are the norm.

- **The unacclimated resist or react harder**

It is not only an age question.

A good number of people on your payroll entered a working world where customers did not scream at staff, and anyone in the workforce before COVID has seen the shift. It is not strictly generational, either. What matters is that whoever has not adjusted reacts harder.

"My first job was at a McDonald's, wearing pea green polyester. Back then this stuff didn't happen. Nobody screamed at each other."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Obstacle 4 — Fatigue

Composure is a finite resource, and it runs out.



- **Tense interactions require focus and discipline**

Every one of them costs something.

- **Repeated confrontations drain the reserve**

Gradually, across a shift.

- **Interactions later in the day are harder**

Even when the person's head is in the right place.

- **Emotional fatigue drives reactive responses**

The most under-managed obstacle of the four.

The fourth is the simplest and the most ignored. Someone can start the day resilient and with their best foot forward, and after eight people in a row have gotten in their face, they are burned out enough to lose it — the sheer beating a person takes across a bad shift is the cause. TPOP ran a run of webinars on exactly this during the World Cup, when restaurants were overwhelmed, language barriers were common, and the pressure never let up.

"You might start the day feeling strong and resilient, and then hour after hour you're getting beat up, beat up, beat up, and it just gets to a point where you start to lose your cool."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

PART 4

The C.A.L.M. Response Framework

"We're trying to be catchy — something that'll stick in your head, or look good on a break room poster."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

The C.A.L.M. Response Framework

Four ordered moves that survive contact with a real guest.

- **A simple, repeatable structure**

Four letters, retrievable under stress.

- **Helps guide behavior under pressure**

A default that beats improvising.

- **Designed for real-world interactions**

Built for a counter, not a classroom.

- **Easy to teach and reinforce**

One letter per pre-shift huddle.

C.A.L.M. is the acronym TPOP uses to train de-escalation responses: Check for safety, Act with control, Listen with empathy, Manage the outcome. Under pressure nobody recalls paragraphs, so the point is not the letters themselves — it is that a person mid-adrenaline can retrieve four steps in sequence when they could not retrieve a policy. The order carries weight too: safety is assessed before anything is attempted, and an outcome is only negotiated after the person has actually been heard.

A Two-Second Pause is the Entire Skill

A trait and a skill are two different things.

- **Composure is a temperament, not a technique**

The even keel when someone gets in your face.
Some are wired for it; most are not.

- **A pause can be drilled**

Start, stop, rep — rehearsed in a pre-shift.

- **The gap between stimulus and response**

Where every technique in this guide lives.

- **No pause, no de-escalation**

Just two people mirroring each other.

This is the single move the entire framework hangs on, and the presenter called it his favorite slide of the deck. Personalities do not change — anyone with a few kids can tell you they arrive with their temperament already installed. But a two-second pause is a drillable behavior with a beginning and an end, and it can be rehearsed in a pre-shift in under a minute. That is the difference between asking someone to become a different human being and asking them to do one specific thing.

"'Stay calm' is a personality trait. You either have it or you don't. 'Pause two seconds' is a skill — it has a start, a stop, and a rep. You can drill it."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

C — Check for Safety

Quick scan. No words yet.



- **Assess immediate surroundings**
Who else is here, and where.
- **Identify potential threats**
Weapons, intoxication, a second person.
- **Ensure there is an exit path**
Never let yourself be cornered.
- **Only proceed if safe**
Otherwise this stops being a service problem.

The first letter is a scan, not a script — and importantly, no one is talking yet. Take the temperature of the room and of the individual, and get a feel for what is about to happen if you choose to engage with this person at all. If any part of that read comes back unsafe, the correct move is to disengage and escalate rather than attempt the remaining three letters.

A — Act With Control

Your body and your voice, before the content.



- **Avoid mirroring behavior**
Do not match volume, pace, or posture.
- **Maintain calm tone and posture**
Open hands, steady voice, no advance.
- **Use rational detachment**
Stay in the problem, stay out of the drama.
- **Do not take the situation personally**
Easier said than done, and still the job.

Rational detachment is the working skill: staying professionally engaged with the problem while declining to be recruited into the other person's drama. It is the letter that takes the most practice, because it asks a person to do the opposite of what their body has already started doing. Those first seconds are upon the employee whether they are ready or not, which is why the two-second pause sits underneath this letter.

L — Listen With Empathy

It does not matter if you agree.



- **Allow the person to speak**
Even when they are unloading on you.
- **Acknowledge their feelings**
Say the frustration out loud.
- **Show understanding without agreeing**
Validation is not concession.
- **Reduce the emotional intensity**
That is the goal of the letter.

None of this is about agreeing with anyone. Let them get it out, then reflect back what you heard: I understand how you feel. That makes sense. I'd be upset too. That sounds frustrating. Said plainly it works; said with a sigh it reads as placating or sarcastic and makes things worse. The aim is simply to come at it from a position of understanding.

M — Manage the Outcome

Even if they are yelling, YOU have the power.



- **Set clear and respectful boundaries**
What you can do, and what you cannot.
- **Offer realistic options and next steps**
Two real choices beat one vague promise.
- **Keep it moving forward if appropriate**
Toward resolution or toward an exit.
- **Hand off to a manager or call police if necessary**
Ending it is a legitimate outcome.

The last letter is where the interaction resolves, and the trap to avoid is getting pulled onto the hamster wheel of the fight. There is an end to this situation and it is the employee's job in that moment to steer toward it — with plain boundaries, options they are actually empowered to deliver, and forward motion. And when they cannot get there, handing it to a manager is the answer, which is where Part 5 begins.

"As soon as you're in an argument, you're done. You're not going to be able to change the situation once you're already knocking heads."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

PART 5

The Handoff to a Manager

"It's not your job to come and embarrass or shame your employee. Even though you want to interject yourself, it's not about 'okay, what's going on here.'"

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

The Handoff

The critical 90 seconds that many managers get wrong.



- **Never open with 'What's going on here?'**

It forces your employee to re-litigate in front of the customer, and it signals that escalating worked.

- **Get your employee out of the sightline in 90 seconds**

Protect them from what will likely be criticism from the customer.

- **Introduce yourself and take it over**

Speak to the customer: 'Hi — I'm Daniel, I'm the manager. Tell me what happened.'

- **Never reverse their decision in front of the customer**

If you must give more, frame it as authority: 'I'm able to do something Marcus isn't authorized to do.'

Speaking to the customer first is what makes this work. You want to hear from them, you want them to vent and feel heard, and you want the empathy piece doing its job — even if what they do with the floor is complain about your employee. Then clear that employee out. Nothing good comes from leaving them within earshot: they may pipe up, they may push the temperature back up, and at best they stand there absorbing it. The point is never to leave someone feeling powerless. You want them to feel they can hand you the ball.

"You don't want them to be a spectator to their own humiliation, so the best thing you can do is move them away."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

The Three-Minute Debrief

Never let an incident die silently — it teaches the crew that leadership didn't care.



■ Within 10 minutes

'Are you okay? Do you want five minutes off the floor?' Not 'what did you do wrong.'

■ Use the four obstacles to name what got in the way

Nature, nurture, acclimation, or fatigue — which one was it?

■ Before end of shift

'What did you notice first?' 'Same or different next time?' Two questions, ninety seconds.

■ Before you go home, log it

Including the verbal-only ones. Pattern data is what gets you budget and protects you in litigation.

This is the single best coaching moment a manager will get, and the order of the questions is the whole trick. Ask about the person before you ask about the incident. Anyone with teenagers at home already knows the mechanism: shame a person once and they will hide the next one from you, and you have broken the communication bond you were trying to build. Leaving an incident unacknowledged does more damage than the incident.

"The first question you ask sets whether they ever tell you about the next one."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

PART 6

Building a Program That Transfers

"Training is not a one-and-done element. Repetition is what turns training into behavior, and it only takes a couple minutes a week."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Safety Overrides Service

Say it as a promise, not a policy. If they've never heard it, they assume the opposite.

■ **Personal safety comes before the transaction — always**

No job and no order is worth getting hurt over.

■ **Nobody will be written up for ending an interaction early**

State that part explicitly.

■ **Your people have standing permission to walk away**

Standing, not case-by-case.

■ **Escalate to a manager or to police without asking first**

No permission required in the moment.

Crews escalate because they believe disengaging means failing at their job, and the only thing that changes that belief is hearing a manager say otherwise, out loud and by name. This is safety-first for the obvious human reason, and also because it is what keeps the business solid enough to keep paying everyone — and because it builds a real bond with people you spend this much time around. When management visibly values someone's safety and intelligence, it plants seeds that grow.

What Actually Transfers to the Floor

Almost every QSR already has de-escalation content. The ones where it changes behavior share six things.

1. It starts on day one

First-shift exposure is normal here; habits set in the first ten shifts.

3. Psychology before technique

A phrase list collapses under pressure; an understanding of the pattern survives it.

5. Short and repeated

Ten-minute modules revisited through the year beat one annual hour.

2. It covers everyone

A manager-only program produces four untrained people per shift.

4. Scenarios, not principles

If they've never said the words out loud, they won't find them at the window.

6. It gets measured

Without a baseline you cannot show it worked or justify the next budget cycle.

Pillars three and five are the two that most programs miss. On scenarios: do not invest in anything that does not look, smell, feel, and sound like a QSR — a video of a confrontation in a bar does not transpose into a drive-thru, and that is not how the mind works. People recognize the situations they actually face. On length: attention spans are short and getting shorter, so bite-sized wins.

The Initial Training Is Only the Beginning

Repetition is what turns training into behavior — and it takes minutes per week.

■ **5 min / week — one C.A.L.M. letter in pre-shift**

Rotate C, A, L, M. Four weeks covers the framework, then start again.

■ **Every incident — run the debrief**

Two questions before end of shift. The best coaching moment you get.

■ **90 seconds — one live role-play**

You play the customer. Awkward twice, normal by the third time.

■ **Every time — catch them doing it right**

Recognize a de-escalation the way you'd recognize a drive-thru time.

And the one that outweighs all four: your crew copies how you handle an angry customer, not what the module told them. It is a lot like parenting — if the boss loses their cool and handles it badly, that is what gets taught, whatever the curriculum said. Physician, heal thyself.

Three Things to Do This Week

Small enough to actually happen.

1. Run one five-minute pre-shift on the two-second pause

Not the whole framework. One idea, one shift, one store. See if anyone mentions it back to you.

3. Start logging verbal incidents, not just physical ones

You cannot manage what you don't count — and right now most operators answer 'we don't track it.'

2. Write your store's handoff rule and say it to every shift lead

One sentence: what the crew says, and what you say when you arrive. Most stores have never decided this.

Every TPOP webinar closes with a couple of things you can carry into the week ahead, and these three were chosen because they are small enough that a busy operator will actually do them. Put them in your pocket and see whether they help in small ways.

A Professional Superpower

Help your team rethink what real power is.



- **Define success as preventing escalation**
Not simply reacting to it well.
- **Recognizing tension and stabilizing it is professional skill**
That is expertise, not passivity.
- **Highlight it in coaching and team discussions**
Make good handling visible.
- **Review missteps as learning opportunities**
Nobody gets a spanking. Use the four obstacles as the lens.
- **Recognition and peer acknowledgment reinforce composure**
Reward the people doing it right.

This is the reframe that makes the rest durable. You are not going to turn somebody into a different person, but they will see the value in what this means — that sticking up for yourself does not lead to a better outcome, and that an irate customer needs to get it off their chest even when they are being a jerk about it. Define success as prevention rather than reaction, and composure stops reading as backing down.

"Keeping your cool, taking the high road — that's actually the superpower. That's the muscle. It's very easy to yell back and scream at people. That's what immature people do."

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

CONCLUSION

Your Key Take-Aways

What to carry out of this guide and into next week's schedule.

1 Workplace violence training is essential in today's QSR environment

Conflict at the counter is a routine operating condition now, not an exception.

2 Introduce it early, across all staff

Day one, every role. A manager-only program leaves four untrained people per shift.

3 Keep it practical and repeatable — and hybrid if possible

Some stand-up and scenario work, some online to document it. Minutes per week, not one annual hour.

4 Leadership drives prioritization and consistency

Your crew copies how you handle an angry customer, not what the module told them.

5 Safety always overrides service

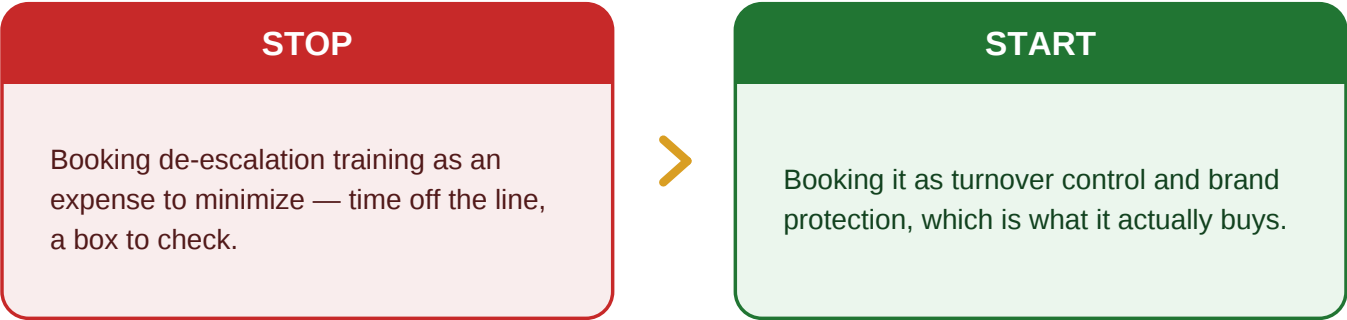
Standing permission to walk away, stated out loud before it is ever needed.

A TWO-SECOND PAUSE IS THE ENTIRE SKILL

The gap between stimulus and response is where every technique in this guide lives. You cannot coach a personality, but you can drill a pause — and without that pause there is no de-escalation, just two people mirroring each other.

Training Is Not a Cost Center

The objection that stops most de-escalation programs is time on task: minutes off the line feel expensive and immediate, while the costs of not training feel distant and hypothetical. Booked as an expense, this gets deferred every time the schedule tightens. Booked as what it actually controls — turnover and brand exposure — it earns a permanent line, and the conversation stops being about whether to do it.



Move	What It Looks Like
Count the right numbers	Set module minutes against ~144% turnover, \$5,900+ per replacement, and one 90-second video.
Train everyone, from day one	Onboarding for every role — habits set in the first ten shifts.
Lead with the why	Psychology before technique. A phrase list collapses under pressure; the pattern survives it.
Buy scenarios, not principles	If it doesn't look and sound like a QSR, it won't transpose to your drive-thru.
Make it minutes, not hours	One C.A.L.M. letter per pre-shift and one 90-second role-play beat an annual session.
Log the verbal-only ones	A pattern you never logged is still a pattern — it just becomes someone else's exhibit.

Q&A Highlights

Real questions and answers from the session's live Q&A, lightly condensed.

Q How does any of this work at the drive-thru window? We can't read body language through a speaker box, and by the time they're at the window they're already hot.

There is a wall there — car, window — so you do have a degree of safety. What changes is that you're reading tone instead of posture, and you should be able to get a feel for someone in just a few words. Then they drive up and you can see the look on their face. Once you're in the interaction, whether they're three feet across the counter or six feet into a car, it tips into the same thing: listen to them vent, offer options, stay respectful even if they don't like the decision. The last thing you want is somebody pulling out their camera and posting about how rude your staff was.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*

Q Most of my crew is 16 to 19 year olds. Is a two-second pause realistic for a 17-year-old getting screamed at? Honestly asking.

Honestly responding: it's less realistic, probably. We're generalizing, and there are plenty of mature seventeen-year-olds who go on to have cool heads. But young people don't have the experience to fall back on — generally speaking young men aren't reaching maturity until their mid-twenties, and here you have them seven or eight years ahead of that. So is it more challenging? Yes. Does that make it useless? Absolutely not. You have even more potential to influence the health, growth, and safety of that person as they make their way into the workforce. Your role is very important in that regard.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*

Q We turn over like 130% a year. What's the point of training people who are gone in four months?

That's dark — but I get it. Here's the point: any effort you make to reduce violence within your workforce comes back to you in spades. Fewer people quit, there are fewer costs, less chance of someone getting injured, and less chance of the god-awful possibility of ending up in court. You do not want to be sitting across from a judge and jury explaining that you really didn't do anything. Being able to say this is what we did, this is the training we invested in, won't necessarily get you off the hook, but it stacks the cards in your favor. It's multi-layered: you're setting a culture that reverberates through your staff even as it turns over, minimizing risk, and reducing legal and insurance ramifications.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*

Q I'm a franchisee with six stores. Corporate has their own training model we're required to do. Can this layer on top of that, or is it a replacement?

Treating it as supplemental training is absolutely possible, and the costs are remarkably low across the board — even for six locations it's likely a rounding error in your organization. You'd want to check with corporate to make sure it's in compliance. Our credentials and references are pretty substantial, so if you need something to take to corporate showing you want to make this modest investment, I think you'd have good luck with that. And look, I'm in the training business — if you don't choose our product, fine. Just don't choose nothing.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*

Q&A Highlights (continued)

Q You said never reverse the employee's decision in front of the customer. But what if the employee was actually wrong? Like they refused a refund they should have given.

Damn good point. The principle is to get your employee off the floor — you want to reduce the opportunity for them to be soul-crushed or contradicted in public, even if they did do something wrong. It is never about shame; shame just builds grudges and gets people to quit. Have Marcus go to the back while you, the manager, solve the problem. So yes, I'll throw in an asterisk: if it's wrong, it's wrong, and you want to do right by the customer. It's about managing the message and the emotions on the way there.

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Q Late night is 90% of our problems. Different crowd, less staff, one manager. Does the framework change after 11pm, or is it the same thing?

It's the same thing — if anything it's even more important. The one thing we didn't cover in the presentation is the increased likelihood of intoxicated people later at night, especially at the drive-thru. People are going to be drunk or stoned and more likely to cause a scene. And remember, not everybody who's acting stoned is stoned — you might be dealing with mental illness or acuity challenges. So hand off to management, keep your radar up, and if it's out of control, call the cops. Managers shouldn't get beat up or injured either.

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Q Nobody is going to log verbal stuff. My GMs are already drowning in paperwork. What's the absolute minimum that still counts as a log?

I'll defer to the operational experts here — I don't run a QSR. The point is more of a rule of thumb: the more instances you can document, the more you'll see a baseline, and the better your record-keeping supports the decisions you make going forward, whether that's investment or noticing that things happen on particular shifts with only one manager on. Data is informational. I can only imagine the drowning-in-paperwork part and I totally get it, so don't go home today and triple your workload. Incremental works. Baby steps, moving things in the right direction.

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Q What happens when it's not a customer, it's two customers going at each other and my crew is stuck in the middle? Do we still engage, or just call 911?

It's a judgment call and it depends how violent it is. Is it just people yelling? Are they squaring off, throwing things, leaning in like they're going to throw a punch? It is not your job or anyone at your facility's job to get hurt, and it is not your job to be referee. If it looks dangerous, call the police. If it looks like something that could diffuse, or words from a distance could help, go for it — but certainly don't put your physical self between people who look like they're about to fight. That is not what you're trained for and not what your legal department wants you to do. The default there, as always, is safety, safety, safety.

— Dan Stechow, TPOP

Q&A Highlights (continued)

Q **We've told people they can walk away, but they don't. They still try to save the sale. How do you actually get them to believe you mean it?**

You catch more bees with honey. Make sure they see you making a fuss over people doing it the right way — they're going to be more drawn to people succeeding in ways they're not than to another explanation. We're not here to change people, we're here to change behavior; behavior can be learned. So reinforce the training, reiterate it, and talk about scenarios. There's a great line: the mind won't go where the body's never been. If you can walk through situations in your pre-shift prep, you give them something they can actually respond to.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*

Q **Do you have anything for the crew member who is the problem? I have one guy who escalates every single time and he's otherwise a great employee.**

Future leader! But now we're into discipline and reprimand. Otherwise-a-great-employee isn't going to matter if that individual instigates or increases the likelihood of workplace violence in your organization and could hurt himself or anyone else there. That's probably the sit-down conversation: look, you've got to overcome this if you want to work here.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*

Q **We've found that training takes employees off the line longer than it's worth.**

I'm going to play healthy skeptic and say I don't think you'll have that same opinion after a litigious event. I'm not wishing that on anybody, but I have friends and associates who provide expert-witness testimony on workplace violence claims for a living, and they will tell you the same thing: organizations that don't make the effort are generally and frequently hit with much harder fines, lawsuits, and payouts. I'd encourage you to reconsider. If what we're offering isn't your cup of tea, that's fine — but de-escalation training is invaluable in every organization and every industry in 2026 and beyond.

— *Dan Stechow, TPOP*



1000+ 5-Star Reviews

Workplace Violence Prevention

ONLINE TRAINING FOR QSR TEAMS

Protect your people. Reduce Conflict. Strengthen readiness.



30 MINUTES TO CERTIFICATION
100% online • No IT requirements

BUILT FOR FRONTLINE RESTAURANT TEAMS

**Practical online training.
Real-world QSR scenarios.**

Short, focused lessons help employees recognize risk, respond appropriately and make safer decisions—without disrupting restaurant operations.

1-YEAR LICENSE

\$249 PER LOCATION
Unlimited team access

2-YEAR LICENSE

\$450 PER LOCATION
Equivalent to \$225/year

Unlimited employees. One low price.
Group pricing available for 5+ locations

FOUR ESSENTIAL TRAINING CHAPTERS IN ~30 MINUTES



01

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Recognize concerns early.
Know when to report.



02

DE-ESCALATION

Reduce conflict with calm,
controlled responses.



03

ACTIVE ASSAILANT RESPONSE

Understand your options
when seconds matter.



04

INTERACTING WITH THE HOMELESS

Handle sensitive interactions
safely and respectfully.

EVERY LICENSE INCLUDES

- ✓ Scenario-based online lessons
- ✓ Built-in knowledge checks
- ✓ Completion certificates
- ✓ Manager reporting tools
- ✓ Current and new-hire access
- ✓ TPOP LMS or SCORM delivery



Chance Favors the Prepared Mind • www.thepowerofpreparedness.com

