

CONFRONTATION PSYCHOLOGY 101: USE YOUR HEAD



Most in your face, social confrontations and conflicts do not need to escalate into violence if they are managed appropriately. In order to preclude violence, it is necessary to take control by using some tried and true social psychology. The fact is that everyone uses social psychology whether they are consciously aware of it or not. It's better to be consciously aware and have a plan. Think out your defensive actions and be deliberate. After an incident, analyze what you did right and what you did wrong, so it can be a learning experience.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PREPAREDNESS

This is not to say that being prepared for the worst, most extreme thing that can happen is not a good thing. It's better to be prepared than not. That's why we carry a gun—just in case we might need it. Remember President Teddy Roosevelt's words, "Speak softly, and carry a big stick." If you have a proverbial "big stick," you can feel confident that you have the strength to back up your politely stated position on the matter at hand.

Just because you are a senior citizen or a woman, it doesn't mean that you automatically look vulnerable. Some of the world's deadliest assassins were female, and some of the most powerful conquistadors were seniors. One of the gents from whom I've taken hand-to-hand combat training was 70 years old when he trained me, and I'd bet a grand on him if he were up against any young black belt.

As we've hammered away in previous columns, if you do choose to carry a gun (which I recommend, but not for everyone), you had better be mentally and physically prepared to confront an aggressor who is intent on doing you bodily harm. Physical fights are quick and ugly. Paraphrasing noted firearms trainer Clint Smith, *a fight is never what you want it to be, it is what it is.*

TO BE A WINNER OR SURVIVOR

Successfully resolving and winning an ugly, violent, social confrontation involves more than just fighting skills. To be a winner or survivor, you need:

- situational awareness and preparedness.
- the ability to read people's behaviors.
- the ability to communicate, move and fight.
- the willingness to do whatever it takes to survive and the means to do so.
- adequate flexibility.
- the ability to control fear.
- the ability to quickly take whatever actions are appropriate to the situation.
- the ability and willingness to fight like hell if you have no other choice.

With that said, most social conflicts can and should be resolved non-violently. However, in order to resolve a social conflict successfully, we must have the right skills, priorities and ethics—yes, ethics. When you have right on your side, you have a lot more power than when you do not, and sometimes the right thing to do is to just back off. **And you have to use your head!**

POST HOC ANALYSIS

Social confrontations, disagreements and conflicts seldom need to escalate into violence. If you get through an incident in one piece, in retrospect (i.e. post hoc), you can learn for the future by analyzing what you did right and what you did wrong. So then, the next time you can use your head. For example:

Incident. The other day, my wife and I were at the movies, and two off-the-wall, foreign speaking gang bangers in their late teens or early twenties sat down next to us. Their behavior was rude and obnoxious. I was in the aisle seat and my wife was seated to my right. The skin head kid who sat himself next to my wife started fidgeting, taking cell phone calls, playing with his hi-tech Game Boy, and playing with what looked like a butterfly knife and a small flashlight. In the space of a half-hour, he was in and out of the aisle three or four times.

First, I traded seats with my wife. Then, as my wife and I saw it, we had several options:

1. One option was to say something to the restless, crazy kid seated next to me. I chose not to say anything, as I felt anything I said would fall on deaf, drugged up ears.
2. Another option was to report his behavior to the management. I ruled that out, since unfortunately, there was no one around that fit that role.
3. A third choice was to find another pair of seats. That was not viable — all seats were taken.
4. A fourth option was to leave. We chose not to do that.
5. Our fifth choice was to stay and continue to watch the movie. That's what we chose to do.
6. Sixth. I won't say what I would have liked to have done. It wasn't even an option!

Post Hoc Analysis. We made two major mistakes.

1. We should have reported the kid's behavior to "the management," whomever "the management" was. By doing so, we would have created a record of what was going on to protect us legally, if things had escalated. That also would have given "the manager" the option of talking to the kids, asking them to behave or leave the theater, or calling the police.

2. We should have left and gotten a rain check from the management, as well as a pair of free tickets for another movie. We could have gone into another movie, or gone for coffee or a drink.

What was I thinking? Answer: That the ignorant kid would continue his restless behavior. His friend was surprisingly well behaved. I'd say nothing and remain annoyed, all the while keeping a peripheral eye on the restless kid. Eventually the movie would finally end. DUH!

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND PREPAREDNESS

When we left the theater, I watched our backs. I watched where the punks went in the parking lot (to a brand new top of the line SUV). I also watched my rear view mirror on our ride home. Oh, and yes, I was armed with my .40 caliber carry Glock 27, in a strong side IWB holster, an extra magazine, a SureFire E2D Executive Defender flashlight, an Emerson pocket karambit, my keys which are attached to a kubotan, and my back-up gun in my off-side front pants pocket, a L.W. Seecamp .380. My wife carried her pepper spray.

I was prepared if the situation had turned ugly, but I could have made some better decisions, as detailed above. I felt foolish when we got home, and this article probably is my *mea culpa*.

LESSON LEARNED

Accept that an incident may ruin your evening or day, but it's a lot better than doing the wrong thing, such that the incident escalates and ends up ruining your life!

RUDENESS

Social rudeness is a big problem nowadays. Kids (and adults) seem ruder than ever. Many don't think twice about flipping you the bird, calling you a dirty name to your face for no good reason, or engaging in a dozen or more other rude behaviors. Rudeness seems to have outgrown all boundaries, and many people are willing to go to the extreme to make their point.

Being armed is no mandate to act with bravado. Quite to the contrary, it carries with it an obligation to behave conservatively and avoid confrontations when at all possible in the face of rudeness. If a confrontation is unavoidable, then the armed citizen has an ethical obligation to do whatever is reasonable to try to de-escalate the situation. The rule is to be non-confrontational. Behave politely and non-aggressively when you can. When given no other choice but to choose aggressive action, be swift, decisive, and utterly relentless so as to get the job done.

Continued on page 20

Referring to Jeff Cooper's color codes, live in yellow (maximum situational awareness), and be prepared to transition to orange (ready and willing to do whatever is necessary) at a moment's notice. Code Red does not mean you're dead. It means you're in control.

THE ABILITY TO READ PEOPLE'S BEHAVIORS

Nowadays, many kids seem to live in "La-La Land." The other day, my 14 year old daughter thought I was being rude (or "crude") when I asked two teenage boys I had never seen before who were talking to her in our driveway, "Hey there, can I help you?" I guess they thought I was rude as well, because as they rode their bikes away, I overheard them saying something like, "That a^#ole." Oh well. Hey, no surprise. I expected nothing less, hence my come on line.

THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE, MOVE AND FIGHT IF NECESSARY

As a trained clinical psychologist, I have had quite a bit of experience with "assertiveness training." Assertiveness means standing up for your rights. It means verbally stating your preferences and needs, making your personal boundaries clear, and not being afraid (and knowing how) to say "NO" or "NO THANK YOU."

Assertiveness Vs. Aggressiveness.

Being assertive is not the same thing as being aggressive. Being aggressive means being belligerent or antagonistic. There's a time for that, but it's when a social conflict has escalated. It's important to mentally rehearse being assertive in different situations in which you may find yourself. Predators like easy prey. When you give off the assertiveness vibes, it tends to send them away.

Practice speaking up for yourself without overt anger. Practice good eye contact. Keep your head up or level (not down, a sign of submission). Practice perceiving what's going on around you with all five senses. God gave us two ears, two eyes, and two nostrils, but only one mouth, because he knew that it is more adaptive to listen, look and smell than it is to speak before we have enough information.

Rehearse paying attention in different situations and asking yourself questions such as, "What's happening here?" "What's going on?" "What's the best course of action?" "What do I need to do?"

Practice exercising a sense of humor when appropriate. It's often a good way to defuse tense situations.

THE ART OF THE BLUFF

Bluff and deceive. It's what we do when we play poker, and it's what we must do against adversaries in social conflicts. In social confrontations against hostile adversaries the only rule is to win. In a street fight there are no rules. Stay calm. Control your emotions. Act as if you feel confident that you can remain in charge. Communicate through words and body language that you have the upper hand, and that it would be a mistake for your adversary to resort to violence.

Mentally rehearse these behaviors, responses and feelings. Practice with a partner. Practice talking into a mirror. Rehearse getting your delivery (your words, voice tones and gestures) to where you want it to be.

Flexibility and the ability to control fear come from having a range of adequate response options. Don't allow aggressive people to intimidate you. Keep your cool. Use your head, but at the same time, pay attention to your gut.

Don't waste words either. Don't be overly talkative. Be clear in what you say. Say what you mean, and don't threaten unless you're prepared to back up the threat with real action. If your bluff is tested, and you come up empty, you'll have more of a problem.

OBSERVE, ORIENT, DECIDE, AND ACT SPELL "OODA"

This is what is called the "OODA" loop. We all go through this perceptual-motor loop when we are confronted or surprised, or when we encounter novel or discrepant stimuli.

First we **Observe** something out of the ordinary. That triggers the **Orienting** reflex. We automatically orient to the discrepant stimulus. Then, we must **Decide** what to do, how to react, how to handle it. The final step in this flow is to **Act** on our decision. Most of the time, this OODA cycle takes seconds, and we OODA hundreds of times a day.

In a confrontation, the goal is to make our adversary OODA so that we can buy time to react, and gain the upper hand. We want to throw our adversary off balance. This gives us time to OODA out there, or finish the fight **before** it gets started. What this often translates into is distracting and disorienting our adversary. However, to do so we have to keep our cool. Some examples are in order:

Example #1. A guy is tailgating you. You keep your cool and keep driving. He passes you and flips you the bird. You don't flip it

back. You gesture with your hands and eyes that he has the right of way.

Example #2. A guy approaches you on the street, and asks for money in an aggressive manner. You keep your distance. You don't take out your wallet. You have a couple of dollar bills in your pocket folded in a paper clip just for such an occasion. You tell him "Sure, no problem. Here you go," as you toss the bills onto the ground and move away quickly, watching your back and your 360.

Example #3. You're rushed at gunpoint by a guy who wants you to come with him. There is no distance. It's a close-in situation. You redirect his attention to "the big guy behind him," relieve him of his gun, and render him inoperable or beat feet.

Example #4. A couple of gang bangers approach you on the street and begin to sound off about your sexuality. You keep your cool. You look for your escape route and you ask them if they want to visit the station where you're late for your shift. If necessary (i.e., you believe them to be an immediate threat to your life and limb), you partially brandish your carry gun, and tell them authoritatively that you're pretty sure they're not looking for trouble.

SUMMING UP

In sum, learn confrontation psychology, and learn to psyche yourself to use your head and psyche out your adversaries. If you can avoid a fight, you've won the battle. You have to train yourself to separate your will from your fear. Accept that an incident may ruin your evening or your day, but it's a lot better than doing the wrong thing, which may escalate the situation and end up ruining your life! After an incident, analyze what you did right and what you did wrong, so it can be a learning experience.

Predators are drawn to fear like sharks to blood. It's adaptive to turn your fear into righteous anger, but don't let anger cloud your judgment.

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