

Managing Unknown Contacts

I've been on the road now teaching citizen self defense courses for about a year, and it's been very educational for me. I've been able to improve my own course work based on student feedback and more importantly I've been able to prioritize the presentation of my material.

As everyone probably knows at this point I'm a fanatic about *contextually underscored* training. We should always be examining the *problem* and focus our solutions accurately.

Tactics

I've come to realize in the citizen self defense world are more often than not, merely paid lip service to. Most training focuses on technical development of motor skills whether that's shooting, blade work, or empty hand skills.

So what we're going to focus on in this tutorial are tactics, particularly pre-engagement tactics. I teach this block of instruction **first** in every class I do, regardless of the particulars of the skill-set, and I feel like it's probably the most important.

Lee has already written an excellent piece on stranger confrontations, and this material is very in-line with his thread. This is just my take on the subject matter.

There have been several threads in The Codex already which cover the Criminal Assault Paradigm and it's important that one study that material first. After all we *must* understand the problem, before we can discuss *solutions*.

Awareness

We speak about this often in self defense and protection training and we even have models such as The Color Code to help us understand this concept. Awareness is critical. The more *aware* we are of our environment, the *earlier* we can spot a potential problem developing.

Is there any key to "awareness"?

The biggest issue I see with the population and awareness is **task fixation** in public venues. When I say "task fixation" I mean allowing yourself to become overly distracted by whatever menial chore you happen to have to perform.

Examples of this?

Talking on a cell phone.

Now we all do this in public, but how often have we seen someone totally engrossed in the conversation they're having and completely oblivious to the environment? I use an earpiece usually and this keeps my hands free and more importantly my head *upright*. We all use cell phones day in and out, but be cognizant of not allowing yourself to become so **fixated** with the **task** of speaking, that you forget where you're at and what's around you.



Finding the right key

Is there any reason that one couldn't do this in the safety of a well lit supermarket, *before* they walk into that poorly lit parking lot?



Sitting in a stationary vehicle with the ignition off

This is a pet peeve of mine that's a borderline phobia, I believe due in part to the number of times I've been assaulted in a vehicle. One is **extremely** vulnerable in a stationary vehicle. Is there any reason why we can't *wait* to balance the checkbook until we get home?

Now these are all simple common sense things, but unless you are conscious of the tendency we all have towards **task fixation**, it's really easy to allow oneself to fall prey to it.

Avoid task fixation in public.

That's the best advice I can give someone to increase their sphere of awareness.



Maintaining Range

So we should understand that *awareness* is a key factor in identifying a potential problem *early*.

The *earlier* I identify a potential problem the more *time* I have to choose a solution.

In this picture I'm being flagged by an unknown contact. At this point I have no clue as to whether his intentions are benign or hostile, but because I picked up on the problem *early* I have more time to try and manage this unknown contact.



What I do is step around the bumper of a vehicle to put a slight barrier between he and I.

At this point, what I have to do is maintain *range*. **If** this unknown contact is hostile then he's going to want to close the gap on me. Why? To take what he wants by force or threat of force. Even firearms assaults perpetrated by bad guys usually entail getting up close and personal with the victim. Criminals don't want to get **caught** and generally are trying to be **furtive**. If the bad guy stands off at five yards and holds me at gun point, that's going to be much more obvious to any passer-by or beat cop, than if he has a pistol stuck in my gut while he hugs me close like a drunken friend.



To maintain range I have to use some kind of verbage. I have to tell him **something** that makes him stop coming closer.

Now the debate here is do you *ask* someone what they want or what their business is or do you *tell* them to stop and hold their ground?

I think a good middle ground for the initial verbalization with an unknown contact is to *ask* politely but firmly for someone to stop. A phrase such as "Hey buddy would you hold there for a minute?" allows someone to comply with your request, which isn't rendered rudely. If they stop advancing, *then* you can ask them what they want.

It's a small thing, but if your initial verbalization is "Can I help you?" then that does nothing to maintain range and actually encourages someone to come closer.



Now let's discuss verbalization a bit.

If you have asked him to stop and he doesn't what then?

If you have range, which we understand is directly proportional to our awareness; we can ramp up our verbage from a *request* to a **command**. What I also recommend is that you change the specific language and increase the volume. So if we start at "Hey buddy would you hold there?" we'll kick it up next to "I said BACK-UP!"

What if he still doesn't stop or say he begins to verbalize somewhat but still keeps advancing?

Once again, we can kick up our verbage a bit by adding some profanity.

Now there are some trainers that will tell you to never, ever use profanity. What I've seen over my career in law enforcement is that profanity is part of

criminal vernacular and bad guys understand it. If you do elect to use profanity, use it to accentuate the message and don't directly insult someone with it. There's a big difference between "Back the **fuck** up" and "Back up **motherfucker**".

So **if** we have *range and time* we can escalate within our verbal options from:

A polite *request* to stop advancing.

A *louder command* to stop advancing, using different specific language.

Shout the same command at the top of your lungs and accentuate that with carefully selected common criminal vernacular, i.e. profanity.

Along with verbalization we want to utilize our Fence.

In discussions I've had with the UK combatives community, the primary reasoning for the fence in their application, is a platform for the pre-emptive strike. The fence indeed does excel at this but there are two more things that it does also.

First, a palms outward fence in particular *reinforces* the **verbal** message to not come any closer. Secondly, a good *high* fence, *frames* a quicker, more efficient default response should that be required.



Assessment

At some point in an unknown contact management, as much as possible we want to try and assess the threat potential.

Now we can't ever know what's going on in another person's mind, but there are recurring kinesic "cues" that manifest themselves more often than not.

In my undercover heyday, usually after something bad happened to me, I'd go back and watch the video, trying to figure out why I had just been hurt or had my ass handed to me. After some time I realized that the same things were happening time and time again right before it went south. Later, after I came out and started working top-side (opposite of undercover) and began running my own informants and U/C officers, anytime an assault occurred I'd watch the video and see the same things that I had seen in my own.

So I'm going to cover some common pre-assault cues, or recurring body language that assailants exhibit right before they launch. Now this list is not comprehensive, and there are more than what I'm going to list, but I have **personally** seen these three occur time and time again. We're going to discuss these three as a "cluster" and then add one more pre-assault cue that I want you to think about stand alone. So it's kind of a "3+1" model.

The first cue that we'll discuss is **Grooming**. When I say Grooming, I mean any kind of movement of the hand around the face. I'm not a psychologist, but I've been told that this is some kind of unconscious effort to mask deception and this correlates to grooming cues that I've seen both right before an assault, and from subjects who are lying in formal interrogations that I've conducted as an investigator. A grooming cue might be rubbing the back of the head.



The back of the neck.



Or perhaps covering the mouth.

Regardless of the specific behavior, these cues all fall under the grooming category.



Next we have **Target Glancing** usually to the subject's own 3, 9 or 6 o'clock.

Here we have a target glance to the subject's 3 o'clock combined with a grooming cue.



Followed by another glance over to 9 o'clock



Finally the last cue we'll discuss is a **Discernable Weight Shift**. Usually when someone shifts their weight noticeably from one foot to the other, or from one side to another, the reason for this, is that it's an effort to increase **traction**. They might not be aware of why they're doing it but that's the reason.

The side or foot that the weight shifts to, quite often can indicate the handedness of the person that you're dealing with. That may not even be useful information, but there again it may be.

Here we have a target glancing to 6 o'clock.....



...followed by a discernable weight shift from the left foot to the right. He has planted himself.



So our "cluster" of pre-assault cues are grooming, target glancing and a discernable weight shift.

If we combine that cluster of three with a **fourth** stand alone cue of a *furtive movement of the hand towards the waist*, then that's a lot of information that we can reasonably assume means an assault is possibly imminent when that information is framed in the context of the environment and an unknown contact management scenario.

So far this is where we're at.

1. *Awareness* is critical to recognizing a problem early
2. The key to good awareness is avoiding **task fixation** in public.
3. Once a potential problem is identified we utilize verbage reinforced with the fence to maintain range.
4. We can escalate within verbage.
5. While verbalizing with an unknown contact we should make as good of an assessment about intent as possible, looking for pre-assault cues which manifest themselves.

The objective of this process is to give one the option of, and criteria for **pre-emption**. Pre-emption or taking **initiative** is always preferred to waiting on the other person to do something. We train a *default position* for when we **screw up** this process.

Now we've discussed the Criminal Assault Paradigm and we should understand that quite often there will be another assailant involved. Why wouldn't there be? After all it increases the chances of successfully committing a crime.



One thing we should include in our unknown contact management process is a scanning procedure that allows us to focus on the **known** potential threat, while bringing the probable unknown threat into our visual periphery.

So what we'll do during our contact management phase is actually improve our chances of picking up a second adversary by improving our **position**.

Specifically what we'll do is move all the way to our 9 or 3 o'clock **while** maintaining a **hard focus** on the *known*. The reason that we move to 9 or 3 is to bring what was *behind* us into our periphery.

This means that you don't turn your head and look behind you. If you do that while someone is only a step or two away, they'll own you if they want to.

Here, automatically, I've begun to move to my three o'clock. Notice I don't **turn** my head away from the known problem.



And I end up on my three, able to discern an incoming adversary in my periphery, who **was** coming in on my 6 had I not moved. That's the main thing we're looking for with this particular tactic, is to be able to pick up **movement**.



Same thing in this series except for now I'll move to my nine...



Continually moving so I can pick up what was behind me in my periphery....



...until I reach my objective and see...

"Oh shit!" "Got one coming behind me".

In teaching this on the road over the past year I've noticed that in addition to picking up the unknown threat, it makes it *really* hard to pin down the good guy and make for any kind of grab, when someone is constantly moving in this manner.



Okay the last tactic we'll discuss in unknown contact management is *pre-emptively establishing grip on a weapon*.

Paul and I usually do a neat little drill on day two of the ECQC course that shows the time differential in the drawstroke between a full concealment presentation and beginning with one's hand already on the gun. The average between the two is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second. That's pretty significant and the reason we do this drill is to hammer home the fact that the most difficult part of the drawstroke is in clearing away the concealing garments and establishing grip on the weapon.

Now when we combine this with a one-handed fence with the off-hand we have a very aggressive posture. It is a definitive escalation when we move from a two handed fence...



...to a one handed fence with the strong hand on the butt of the gun.



I really like this position for threat management and have taken to calling it C1 in my typical shorthand, which stands for "Challenge 1". That's essentially what we're doing when we do this...we're challenging a potential threat and it also happens to be the first count of the normal drawstroke, hence C1. Just like A2 is the "Averted 2" which I teach for a temporary muzzle aversion. I like positional dynamics with the pistol to try and stay within the normal scheme of the drawstroke, since drawstroke is our cornerstone fighting motor skill with the handgun in particular.

The cool thing about C1 is that it cuts the draw time way down, **but** it keeps the pistol in the holster. This is important for two reasons.

First if you screw-up and make an incorrect assessment, no one can say that you pointed a gun at an innocent citizen, hence you can avoid the "brandishing" misdemeanor that some states have.

Secondly the gun is way more retainable in the holster than out of the holster.



So C1 is a really good tactic that has a lot going for it. Any cons?

Well let's face it, when you make that definitive move to your waistline, it lets him know that we're **armed**. That may be a good thing and deter him from making any more advances.



We've *also* let **everyone** know that we're armed including that bad guy that we may not see.

When we move to C1 we have to be ready to **immediately** defend the gun. Now that's common sense, but the reason I'm making an issue of this is that in my opinion people go to this tactic far too cavalierly without thinking about all the implications of what they're doing in the context of criminal assault patterns.



So now the movement/scanning procedure becomes even more necessary if we escalate to C1 from the fence.



Moving now to my nine...



...and ending where I can pick up what was behind me in my periphery.



That's it for this one guys. This material, whether it's the way I teach it or someone else's take, is probably the **most important** that one can master. If you *really* own this stuff, for the most part you'll *probably* never get criminally assaulted.

Enjoy!

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