

The Self Defense Mindset



4th Degree Black Belt Thesis

By

David Strobel

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Introduction

When I first started training in American Kenpo I was immediately drawn to the logical and realistic application of the art. Even though I didn't understand the application of how the techniques, sets, and forms would fully benefit me later in my training.

The hardest part for me to wrap my head around was what I considered, at the time, to be the perceived overkill or brutality of the responses to what I considered menial attacks such as a push or grab. I thought it seemed extreme to potentially break a limb or inflict harm for these attacks.

After training for a few years and listening to my much more experienced teacher I better understood the reactions we use are not only justified, but required.

In this thesis I will cover the moment it clicked for me, the other aspects that shaped my mindset along the way, and training methods I feel are best suited to applying it.

The mentality of self defense:

“If you can’t get out of a fight, get into it.”

~ Frank Trejo

The WHY.

The first thing you need to develop the proper mindset for self defense is to find out your “why”. Without that it’s going to be damn near impossible to effectively use your training and defend yourself.

I can’t pinpoint the exact time that I had my ah ha moment, but I believe I was either a purple or green belt at the time. We were working on a push technique and I was asked about the response and I thought about the potential consequences of what a seemingly innocuous push could inflict.

After a little bit it dawned on me that even a push could drastically alter not only my life, but the lives of my family and friends.

Say someone pushes me and I’m either not ready for it or didn’t see it coming. I lose my balance and fall to the ground, potentially hitting my head on a rock or maybe a curb. So now I’m concussed or even worse. At that time one of two things are going to happen. The attacker sees that I’m down and defenseless leaves, or worse, he continues the attack and I’m even more severely injured or worse.

Let’s start with the first scenario of the attacker leaving. So now this injury leads to me having to go to the hospital, incurring insane medical bills, missing work which leads to even greater financial hardships.

That means there's no money coming in to feed my daughters. There's no money coming in to pay my rent or bills. There's no money coming in to provide the essentials that my family needs just to exist.

The second scenario is even worse. I continue to be attacked, my injuries get worse, leading to more bills and worse hardships for my family. Or the attack continues to the point that I'm killed. Leaving my girls without a father and my parents without a son.

So that is my "WHY". I'm not about to let some yahoo put my life or that of my families life in jeopardy because he or she can't control their emotions and lashed out physically for some, more than likely stupid, reason. I will not risk putting myself let alone my family through that. If someone puts their hands on me I'm going all out, no holding back until the threat is neutralized, period.

Now your why may be similar to mine or may be completely different, no matter what your reasons you have to have your "WHY" or else all the training in the world isn't going to make a difference.

Avoidance

The first line of defense in any situation is to avoid the situation in the first place. Whether that means leaving a hostile or potentially hostile situation, using verbal judo, or just avoiding certain people or places all together.

Usually you can tell when a situation is getting out of control, most times alcohol is involved, so your best bet is just to leave that situation and go about the rest of your day and let whoever it is to be an asshole by themselves. The same goes for avoiding places you know are trouble in the first place. If your favorite watering hole also happens to be a bit of a rough place, find another place. No need to put yourself in a bad spot that you never needed to be in in the first place.

The best way to not get hit is to not be there.

Verbal judo is your next best response. If you can talk your way out of a bad spot by all means do it. Sometimes that means swallowing some pride or saying something you may not agree with in order to diffuse the situation. It's not always easy , but it's better than the alternative

Acceptance

If you can't avoid a bad situation and you can't talk your way out of it there's only one thing left that you have to do. Accept what is happening.

I've seen interviews with people that were attacked and almost all of them have said "I couldn't believe this was happening". That leads to people freezing up when the shit hits the fan and is the worst thing that can happen to you in an attack.

You have to accept that the person or persons in front of you are actively trying to hurt you. In my bouncing career I figure I've been in roughly 600 physical altercations or varying degrees and I can tell one thing for certain. Fighting is stupid. It doesn't solve anything, and it doesn't make anything better. It won't undue the insult someone called you or turn back time before someone got their feelings hurt. It's totally illogical in a personal setting and I think that's why so many have such a hard time accepting what's happening

You have to accept that you are going to get hit. No matter how well you can do Star Block or how many years of training you have you will get hit at some point. The sooner you accept that the better.

You have to accept that you are going to have to hurt or harm the person in front of you or you're going to be the one getting hurt or harmed. This one can be harder to accept. Most people are good and don't want to hurt anyone. So when you're put in a situation that calls for violence it can really mess with your head. But you have to accept that you have to inflict damage to them before they do it to you.

Don't hold back

Now that you've accepted what's happening and you're in a fight you need to be the one to finish it and the only way to give yourself the best chance of success is to not hold back.

Mr. Miyagi said it best in *The Karate Kid*. "Walk on road, hmmm? Walk left side, safe. Walk right side, safe. Walk middle, sooner or later...get the squish! Just like grape.". The same goes for defending yourself as well. You either do it or you don't, there is no half assing it.

I think too many believe what they see in the movies where the hero throws a punch and the bad guy drops like a sack of bricks. While that is pretty bad ass in the movies, I've rarely seen it happen in real life. What usually happens is the guy that throws the punch thinks he hits like Mike Tyson when in reality he hits like Cicely Tyson. So they stand there in utter shock that the person they just hit didn't shatter into a million pieces and gets lit up with a barrage of punches.

Now when I say don't hold back it doesn't mean go crazy and mindlessly start swinging. It means keep fighting until the threat is gone, Whether that means he's incapacitated, or he runs away, you keep going until it's over, and you are the one that decides when it's over. There is no bell and no tapping out.

Training for real self defense:

“To hear is to doubt, to see is to be deceived,
but to feel is to believe.”

~ Ed Parker

Train perfectly

When training for self defense it's best to train as perfectly as possible. What I mean by that is focus on hitting your footwork exactly on the angles as in the ideal phase of the technique as it's written. Also, make sure any blocks, parrys, strikes or kicks are done as close to perfect as possible.

There's a saying that goes “you fight the way you train”. While this phrase in the message it is trying to convey is correct, it's also not 100% correct. I say that because when in a real self defense situation there are a lot of factors that are going to affect your ability to react. Those factors can include, but aren't limited to, your adrenalin rush, the environment you're in and your physical limitations (are you injured).

The biggest thing I've noticed in my training and security experience is that when the SHTF fine motor skills go out the window and muscle memory and training kick in subconsciously. So if you've focused on training as perfectly as possible you've got a much better chance of pulling off a version of a technique that will be effective.

One quick side note on the techniques or Kenpo. They are not the rules, they are simply an alphabet of motion that you can use to create your own self defense vocabulary. I've personally had over 600 physical confrontations, of varying degrees or violence, but haven't used 1 complete Kenpo technique. However I have used pieces of many techniques.

Adding some pepper

One thing I stress when teaching a technique is to make sure there is some actual contact involved, with the attack and the defense, which I call adding some pepper. If the attack is too weak in training then your defense is going to match the attack, meaning that you will defend weakly when you need to use it for real. Now of course that is something that needs to be agreed upon by you and your training partner in advance.

Another way to add some spice to your training is to use the equation formula and alter the attack. Now not to blow anyone's mind but Five Swords doesn't necessarily have to be used against a right roundhouse punch. It can be used against a right hand push or grab as well. In reality it will work against any attack where we are working against the inside of the right arm just like Attacking Mace will work against an attack where we are working the outside of the right arm.

Of course altering the attack will work with most techniques so be sure to play with different techniques and see what works and what doesn't.

Lastly I want to encourage everyone to work on their parries, substitute them where hard blocks are called for and see if they work as written or if further adjustments need to be made to make the technique effective.

Conclusion

I believe that having the self defense mentality is more important than physical ability due to the fact that just going through the motions of a self defense technique, while a good start, isn't enough to competently defend yourself in a real word altercation.

You have to be willing and able to go to the extreme of a situation in order to be able to have the ability to pull back when needed.

All the physical training in the world won't do you a bit of good unless you are mentally willing and able to use what you've learned. The same goes for having the mentality of doing whatever is needed to defend yourself but you lack the physical ability to pull it off. Both are needed to successfully defend yourself, your family or your loved ones.

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Salute