

The Psychological Component of Conflict:

by

Paul Jarrett, Sensei, Nidan

In the animal kingdom, there are only two responses to potentially dangerous situations, fight or flight.

As humans, we have four responses to potentially dangerous situations:

- 1 – Fight,
- 2 – Flight,
- 3 – Attempt de-escalation or
- 4 – Shut down.

Most martial artists put extensive training into their physical ability to manage and deal with conflict. However if an individual is unable to psychologically deal with and select the appropriate response for the situation, all the training in the world is of no value.

I am sure we have all seen it, that athletic looking guy in the dojo with the great kicks and sensational hands speed, looks unbeatable. He then commences sparring (kumite) and receives some form of contact to the head. All of a sudden this formidable warrior looks more like a deer in the headlights, eyes like saucers. He is in shock, shuts down and he is unable to continue effectively.



Or the unhinged person on the street who gets right up in the face of an unwilling individual screaming and shouting obscenities at others.

The person being abused goes into panic and shuts down. In most instances, this lack of response will result in our assailant becoming more

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vocal, aggressive and on a majority of situations, escalating to physical violence.

This is because being both physically or verbally abused is something that we are not accustomed to and have had a little, and in some individual's case, absolutely no experience dealing with.

The only way to ensure an appropriate response in both of these situations is to be exposed to the situations, build resilience to them and ensure that through regular conditioning we are in a position to respond appropriately if and when we are placed in these situations.

Interestingly, while training as a young boxer my Coach will constantly say, to be a good fighter you have to be able to do three things:

***“Take a punch,
Throw a punch and
Avoid a punch.”***

That's all it takes!

Interestingly, as I reflect on these insightful words the priority was “Take a punch”. That is because if you get hit and you can't manage that impact effectively, you won't be able to fight back or avoid any further attacks.

I also had an extensive career as a Senior Correctional Officer. Unfortunately, prisons are an extremely violent environment. As part of the training for the position of an officer, potential recruits are subjected to extensive role-playing where they are abused by actors playing the role of inmates just to develop experience in verbal assaults and develop resilience to what is not a normal day to day experience.

I believe that all martial artists ultimately want to be well rounded, to be able to deal effectively with any situation that arises. In order to achieve this emphasis, time must be given to the psychological aspects of self-defence and conflict.

In our own training we cover aspects of verbal and physical abuse regularly just to ensure if and when we are placed into a situation our response will be appropriate and not shutting down. This is done in a controlled environment. It

is not designed to physically hurt or humiliate or be disrespectful to anybody, rather to help grow and develop one's resilience.

Understand, too, that those who are abusing others by yelling are really only damaging themselves. Mark Twain said it best:

Why Do People Yell?

"Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured." – Mark Twain

The skill of being able to deal with these issues is like all others, without regular exposure and practice it will be lost.

Martial artists train to be able to protect themselves, their loved ones and others in a time of need. To do this effectively a practitioner must spend time on the "psychological components of conflict" just the same as the physical responses.



Paul Jarrett

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These articles are part of a series to help students in their quests to understand the principles of self-defence by covering topics that may not necessarily be explained in the normal dojo environment.