

Probabilities Not Possibilities

“Train for Probabilities not Possibilities”

As personal combat instructors it behoves on us to ensure that what we teach resonates with the **probabilities** of violence, not remote **possibilities**. I caveat this by accepting that each of us, depending on occupation, demography, and geography may well face a specific probability of the ‘nature’ of potential violence, which another person won’t; given which, it’s important that we concentrate our training and teaching around those core, specific issues that we and others are likely to face.

If I hark back to my days on the doors in Manchester, when I could put into three ‘scenario boxes’ the way that violence would evolve, I was always careful to ensure that I didn’t let any of my programmed, competition, or broader training techniques intrude. During my years of police training, starting with my Home Office contract to teach at the, then, National Police Training (NPT) HQ facility here in the north, it became apparent that officers were being taught a range of techniques involving kit/weapons and unarmed skills but which were not ‘distributed’ into the the typical scenarios where officers would face a violent assailant.

In other words, they had been given a ‘big box’ of techniques and associated kit, but which items had not been apportioned to specific scenarios; or, more importantly, what shouldn’t have been. So, officers were regularly employing unarmed skills and kit in scenarios for which they were inappropriate. It was a real ‘dog’s breakfast’ and, given the number of officers being accused of excessive and unreasonable use of force to this day, still is.

So, from there and when subsequently I taught at some 12 police forces over many years and I developed about 5 scenarios within which officers could face violence, within the typical and general policing arena, and taught what was specifically needed for each one. There were, of course, specific operational scenarios such as Close Protection, Evidence Gatherer’s bodyguard training, firearms retention/disarm and rapid intervention, which required very specific skill sets with real emphasis though on not letting inappropriate techniques bleed into these very specialised tasks.

On The Door

Back to the door work, and if I just use as an example the nightclub I worked at for some 8 years, as I said earlier there were, in probability terms, just three scenarios that I needed to be prepared for. I specifically worked the door and would be reluctant to go inside until getting close to the end of the night, so that when I eventually did I was going into an

environment of people that I had let in. This never guaranteed that there wouldn't be flare-ups inside as men, alcohol, women and general male, mental deficiency would always be a recipe for stupidity.

I'll try and describe the physical layout of the entrance to the club which had some 7 bars and 5 dance floors over a number of levels and was huge inside, but the entrance to which was just one single door. The door led into a small foyer, probably about the size of one jigsaw mat (a little bigger but not by much). From this foyer, however, two doors led to a large reception area, but the beauty of this physical arrangement was that the single entrance door was a bit like the pass at 'Thermopylae' and whether there were 10,000 Persians trying to get in they could only fight one at a time.

So, when it was busy, I would front the door with another doorman just inside the foyer so if I was engaged in conversation with someone who, say, I was turning away, my colleague could still process the queue. What became immediately apparent to me was that any fighting skills I'd accumulated of many years of Karate competition, such as on the GB and England squads would be the last thing that would help and sooner, rather than later, fortunately, the lightbulb moment happened and I realised that at these close ranges whoever started it would win it.

I don't want to go into the whole raft of support information about pre-emptive striking and all the issues arising, save to say that I trained for the high probability that I needed less not more in terms of techniques, and that there was no backing-up - as some people teach - as there was no where to back up to. This conditioned my thinking on CQC as I now see the dangers in training in open environments where space allows movement, whereas in reality we may be faced with potential violence in restricted space.

Dealing with someone at that location wasn't the end of the scenarios as there could be conflicts erupting in any of the rooms within the club, of which there were many. If we were on the door and a fight started in a particular location, it could either be a DJ or bar staff member who may have seen it and pressed the panic button at their location. At the door we had a box on the wall which had a 'friggin' loud bell and a number of lights with locations - either bars or dance floors, which lit up letting us know where the problem was; then the race began.

Given the distances involved it could often be the case that the fight had stopped before we got there which, as I've written about elsewhere, was good news as the sprint there and adrenalin pretty much finished us before any physical engagement. It's interesting that on occasions, given the volume of people in the club, that the doorman if one had been in that location may well have not seen the fight at all.

If we did have to engage when we got there then we could be dealing with a fight in progress, so different tactics required, or we had to find the miscreants if the fight was

over to get them out and then we'd be fronting people in a press of people with unknown potential assailants, such as the friends of the person we were ejecting. However, after months and years, working these typical patterns of violence, it was reasonably predictive how situations were likely to evolve and how people would be looking to inflict that violence.

However, around the 'tails' of the core probabilities were the the reasonable possibilities, such as multiple opponents and the presence of weapons. It's really hard for martial arts instructors who have invested so much time and effort into their art to have to accept that what is often required in the reality of the self protection arena will be a fraction of the totality of the art they know. If they don't accept this then they will simply be teaching '*martial arts in jeans.*'

A Telephone Conversation

The scenario: I'm sitting at my desk and the phone goes. It's one of our Combat Group instructors, Fred, but you can only hear my side of the conversation 'a la' one of my very favourite comedians - Bob Newhart

Players

Peter Consterdine (PC)

Fred (Fred)

PC "God morning Combat Group, Peter speaking

Fred.....

PC. "Hi Fred nice to hear from you, how's things"?

Fred.

PC "Not so good then eh Fred, but how was that last course you were going to run - the one with the very catchy title"?

Fred:.....

PC. I see, sorry I was referring to the previous course, the one where you were going to teach *Defence Against Attacks from Martian Dwarves.*"

Fred:.....

PC. Shame about that Fred, I thought you were on to a winner with that, but did you get any interest.

Fred.....

PC. So just one guy..... but you thought he was a 'whack job.' Comes as a bit of a surprise that Fred, but no accounting for people eh. So what's the other course you mentioned?"

Fred.....

PC. “Another catchy title Fred - *Defence Against Ten Toe'd Zombies*; but didn't go too well again; any interest at all Fred”?

Fred..

PC Ah - same guy Fred, but probably no surprise when we think about it. Fred, do you remember that conversation we had about training and teaching people for the probabilities of violence not possibilities?

Fred.....

PC. You do remember but don't want to let your public down by missing out anything that could possibly happen to them, however remotely, remote.....I get it Fred and highly commendable, so where to from here?

Fred.....

PC. “A new course eh, but let me stop you Fred, don't tell me I think I've got this one: it's going to be, now let me think- *Defence Against Ten Toe'd Dwarf Martian Zombies*; this could be the one Fred.”

Fred.....

PC. “No, no need for any praise thanks Fred; after many years of these conversations I've got pretty good at this.”

Fred.....

PC. “But you've got a new twist that will really catch fire, eh; what will that be Fred?”

Fred.....

PC. You're going to just run Instructor Courses. Well, as we know, it's often the case Fred when the public won't bite, run an Instructor's course. It will probably be a long one given the topic?.

Fred...

PC. Ah, just a weekend then. Yeh, probably the right idea; you don't want to swamp them with too much too soon given the serious nature of the topic. Any interest Fred?

Fred.....

PC. You've just had one phone call Fred; no, no, don't tell me - there's a pattern emerging here - and I think I can guess who. Anyway, all the very best with it and send me the details.

End of Call

I was speaking with Iain Abernethy on this topic and, given his much wider social media presence, he deals with far more of the “yes, *but what if*” crowd than I do, and this breaks down into two distinct camps. The first are the people who firmly believe we should have an answer for every scenario and, second, those people who don't want to waste one ounce of their martial art and need to create scenarios into which every part of their system can find a home.

These two positions people take are in opposition to articles or videos in which Iain will have echoed the need for, one, simplicity in CQC, as well as training for probabilities and below are two scenarios which, hopefully, illustrate these two camps.

The first is where Iain is speaking to someone who falls into the first camp, but unlike the above phone conversation I had, in this instance it's just the other party we hear;

"Iain, I hear what you're saying 'but what if' I'm confronted in the street by someone threatening violence who drops onto his backside in a BJJ guard position to take me on; I'm going to be screwed as I only train in punching and kicking."

Don't for one minute think this is absurd.....

In the second scenario, it's much of the same, but in this instance it's where we have someone who refuses to accept that the Eastern martial art they've invested years of training in can't, as a complete system, be applied to deal with Western, typically alcohol fuelled violence;

"Iain, I hear what you say, 'but what if' I'm up against highly trained gang of Brazilian Ju Jitsu opponents? So, just in case, I've been practising with my students and I've developed some combinations to deal with this situation that work ever time. When they attack - one after the other, I've found that traditional blocks, head high roundhouse kicks combined with spinning elbows put them all down. And I've told them not to be compliant, so they attack me like people will in reality....."

As Iain points out, by the way, that despite the popularity of Brazilian Ju Jitsu, the UK National Crime Statistics do not seem to indicate that there are roaming gangs of BJJ trained thugs inflicting violence on innocent passers-by. However, it doesn't have to be BJJ and, to be fair, where we have instructors developing real world scenarios, against which they will develop set defences, it's common that the attack will be in the manner of the specific martial art that's being practised.

So, only a short article this time but important. Resist the temptation to try and cover all bases when it comes to thinking about managing violence, rather be absolutely realistic in your thinking, and keep some key principles in mind, not least the unassailable fact that at touching distance **'Action beats Reaction.'** In other words when an opponent is in close proximity *'whoever starts it wins it.'* In 90%+ of 'in-your-face-violence' it should be dealt with by pre-emptive strikes, delivering shock through the transmission of mass (your bodyweight).

Fighting skills are not the answer. Fighting skills are a support system, so that if pre-emption doesn't do the job then you need to know how to fight, but not spar as you might be doing in the Dojo, or as you fight in competition. Be careful what you **'programme...'**

When you're doing any CQC drills, don't work on the assumption that you will have the space and manoeuvrability options you have in the Dojo. The old saying - *"if it won't work in a phone box don't do it"* - has more than a grain of truth in it. If you're programmed to back up when practising training scenarios then, when faced with confrontation, you may well programme that as a reactive action in real life.

However you may be in a crowd of people, have your back against a wall or bar, be sitting down, just gone through a door which has closed behind you, on stairs, just getting out of your car, or be on a busy main road where you can't back off the pavement and into the traffic (which I've seen happen in a video where two police officers are confronted by a gang outside a pub). It's preferable to programme going into the threat, not backing away from it (a whole separate article), and further more the above situations as to how you might find yourself space-wise don't touch on the negative, psychological issue of backing away from a threat, and the encouragement it can give your assailant.

"Don't Applaud Complexity"

Finally, don't applaud complexity. Defensive (pre-emptive) drills have to be simple. The more complex a drill the more potential points of failure it will have. I've written previously about this but you only get 'one free shot.' By that I mean that you could hit 10 people with the same shot but get 10 different reactions. One person may drop straight down, another fly backwards, another fall forwards towards you, one put their arms up, or arms down, and so on. So your first shot is the only one you should plan and then see what next you might need with what's given to you. There can't be a guaranteed opportunity to execute a sequence of techniques you've trained for, as the targets you assumed you'd have won't be there.

I hope this is food for thought and get in touch with any questions or thoughts.

Peter Consterdine

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