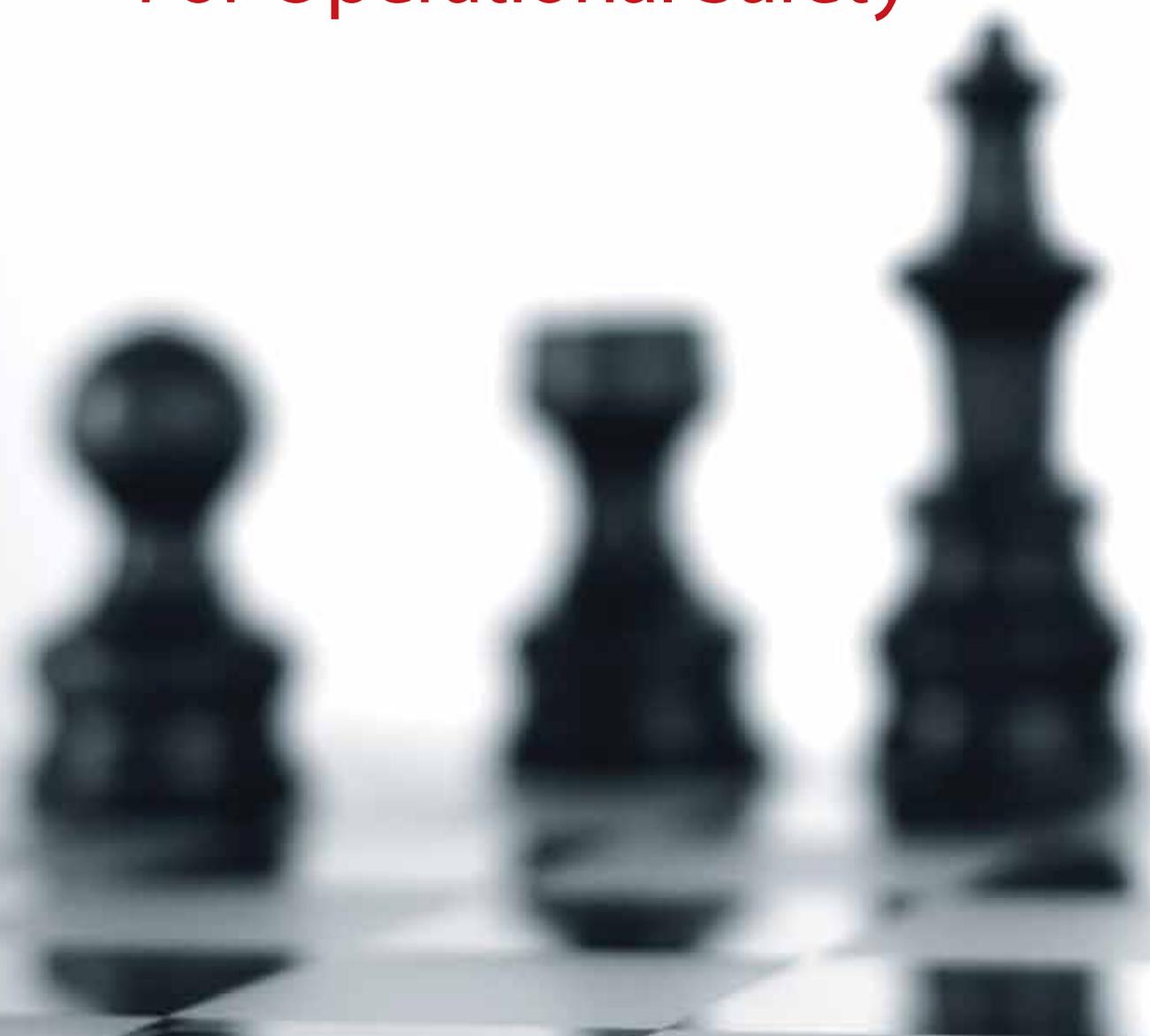


Tactical Control Principles

Principle-Based Lessons
For Operational Safety





By Richard Kay

To be effective in operational reality, defensive tactics must be fluid, relaxed, spontaneous, and more principle-driven, not based on rigid technique. Coping effectively with violence involves prior preparation, mentally, emotionally and physically. If you are prepared for the reality of the environment in which you place yourself, your confidence, assertiveness and resistance to the adverse effects of stress and trauma will increase.

Correct mindset is essential. You must have a 100 per cent survival attitude. Maintaining a calm, assertive awareness is crucial, requires practice and experience, and stems from confidence in your ability to protect yourself and control the situation. Being physically prepared, involves being fit and healthy, as well as being equipped to physically handle the situation before it happens. Regular, realistic and appropriate training is required.

There are three factors to manipulate for physical control – distance, timing and positioning. For an attack to be successful, all three factors need to come together at one point. To be successful in defence, you only have to forestall one of these three variables. Understanding that there are only three variables to manipulate makes it much easier to perceive a solution.

Tactical Principles

Distance is a key factor in determining a security officer's operational safety. During confrontations, officers react to subject actions as the situation unfolds. Safe separation is critical to offset the action/reaction principle. The space between you and the subject is called the reaction gap because it determines the amount of time you have to react to an attack. If you are too close, you will have very little time to react appropriately. A distance of at least the length of two arms, provides time to recognise a sudden attack and react. To maintain safe separation, deal with the subject's momentum and re-establish distance. Distance gives you adequate reaction time. The sooner you perceive the threat, the sooner you can react. Distance = Time = Options.

Balance is the key factor to controlling another person and therefore key to achieving a successful outcome during a physical encounter. Without balance, you cannot move effectively or generate proper power. Violent confrontations are dynamic, so dynamic balance (balance during movement) is crucial.

Proper positioning in relation to the subject's orientation provides a tactical advantage for the security officer. The front-on, 45-degree position is used to communicate and observe the subject. Active countermeasures are deployed from this position. The rear, 45-degree position offers the greatest tactical advantage and is used to restrain and escort the subject. The side positions offer marginal tactical advantage. The front and rear positions offer no advantage and should be avoided.

Proxemics is an awareness of self, relative to the environment. Always leave an escape route, and never enter a situation you cannot safely remove yourself from. Keep in mind that any item you employ could be used against you. Consider aspects such as how and where you stand, fields of view, location of bystanders, cover and concealment, where you park, where you may need to go next, and where and how you may deploy backup.

Body Mechanics

The principles of human movement form the foundation of all physical strategies. Using proper body mechanics increases an officer's potential to control a confrontation while decreasing the risk of injury.

The common aspect of physical conflict is the human body. We are using a body (us), protecting a body (us or another) and manipulating a body (the subject). Work within the natural confines and mobility of human function, as deviation from this will introduce tension. Breathe naturally and continuously throughout, as breath is intrinsically linked with your power and movement.

Posture is determined by the level of resistance encountered by the officer. Proper posture is critical if the officer is to move efficiently and generate effective power. It should be balanced, stable and upright, and facilitate the complete range of response options. Hands should remain above your waist and in front of your body, open, with palms forward, unencumbered and free of distractions. Your arms should be relaxed and extended slightly forward, elbows down and in for protection. Keep one hand between you and the subject, and blade your body from the threat, as appropriate. Proper posture and hand position allows officers to defuse, distract or defend, as required.

Always remain mobile. A static target is easier to hit than a moving target. Through movement, possible solutions to a conflict will appear. Utilise movement as a defence in conjunction with other strategies. Coordinate and differentiate integrated full-body movement with interdependent movement, and be comfortable moving naturally and fluidly between planes (stand, kneel, prone), as the situation dictates.

Effective power entails using maximum efficiency with minimum effort. Initiate your technique from the ground, drive in with your legs and use the natural torque of your body to generate full-body power. But don't compromise balance by over-committing. Relax your body, as tension blocks power and speed, and commit to the technique, mentally and physically. Effective power involves proper timing, which involves coordinating the delivery system (arms, legs and body) with proper use of body mechanics. Do not resist a person's force or intent. Remain flexible and open to opportunities. If they push, yield; if they pull, flow with them. Generate maximum efficiency with minimum effort. A strategy that relies on strength alone will leave you at a distinct disadvantage if your attacker is stronger.

Response options should be simple, as complex movements often fail under stress. Gross motor skills offer important advantages, as they require less training time and are easier to retain. They are also more likely to be performed under stress and are more forgiving, meaning they remain effective even if not done exactly right.

Tactical Soundness

A successful tactic should be simple, sensible and sound. This test of tactical soundness is fundamental to designing, teaching and employing control techniques. It applies particularly to defensive tactics, but it is also relevant when evaluating firearms techniques, deployment tactics, or any operational skill.

An effective tactic or technique is simple – easy to learn, easy to do, based on gross motor skills and feasible under stress when cognition and physical capabilities tend to deteriorate. If something isn't simple in training, it isn't going to get easier on the street.

It should be sensible — based on training and experience; not some sophisticated technique that may work in the movies, but not in the real world. Realistically, it should be a retainable skill, given the amount of time officers have for training and practice. If you don't have time to maintain proficiency in a technique, it shouldn't be in your tactical toolbox.

Finally, it should be sound — it should be street-proven, used successfully in a real operational confrontation. Officers do not want to be the guinea pig, used to find out whether it will work or not when their safety is on the line.

Unnecessary movement adds time, and even a little more time may be time you don't have in a crisis. In a violent confrontation, a millisecond can make the difference between safety and trauma. If you want optimum speed and effectiveness, eliminate all unnecessary movement. Periodically, videotape and analyse your own performance in tactical drills to ensure that superfluous movements have not crept in.

Willingness

Being willing to do what it takes to win is essential to prevailing in a violent confrontation. No matter what skill is involved, if you are not willing to use it at the moment of truth, that skill is worthless. And willingness includes being willing to prepare to win with the training and practice that is necessary.

Unfortunately, there are plenty of officers who are not willing to make that dual commitment. They live in denial that bad things can happen to good people. Just because your intentions are golden, doesn't mean that the next guy you run across isn't going to try to harm you. That will be his choice, not yours. Be willing to train, willing to keep yourself in shape, willing to stay well-rested, willing to remain alert, willing to act decisively and emphatically when you need to. That is all part of winning.

How do you nurture willingness as a relentless commitment to prevail? Specifically identify what you are going to be sacrificing if you give up. What do you love most of all in this world, and why? Is it your family? Your friends? Focus on something absolutely essential to your wellbeing. Feel the full emotion of losing that, and embed that feeling in your mind.

Realise that it is not just you that is affected by your survival. It is everyone and everything you care most intensely about. You're fighting for them. Bring that emotion to your training and to the street, and that will give you the fighting spirit you need.

Mastering survival skills, like getting the most out of life in general, is not always an easy road. Everyone goes through certain times in life when they endure hardships or challenges that seem pointless or inexplicable at the time.

Maybe, during training or practice you do magazine changes repetitively and wonder, 'Why am I doing this?' But, when changing a magazine under fire, something very simple can become very difficult if you haven't practised it sufficiently. You may think mundane drills are unnecessary punishment but, in fact, it is the mundane drills that may keep you alive someday.

A Tibetan proverb can motivate officers through trying times: 'The iron thinks itself senselessly tortured in the blast furnace. The tempered steel blade looks back and knows better.' ■

Richard Kay is an internationally-certified, tactical instructor-trainer and dynamic force-on-force simulation trainer. He is the founder of Modern Combatives, a provider of realistic operational safety training for security and public safety agencies, nationally and internationally. For more information, visit: www.moderncombatives.com.au