





Intuitive Operational Safety: Natural Principles For Effective Strategies

By Richard Kay

A human being is a complete system and for this reason operational safety training should be a complete system as well. Many systems assume that the person in training is healthy. In fact, this is almost never the case. The physiological parameters, such as heart rate, blood pressure, lung capacity, posture, mobility and strength of the joints and muscles, and condition of the nervous system, are rarely ideal. And they are even less likely to have a balanced psyche, free of fear and unnecessary emotions.

Officers should practice operational safety strategies regularly, in a realistic and appropriate manner and environment, coupled with the correct mindset, and using operational uniform and equipment.

Breathing And Tension

When a person perceives danger, heart rate and blood pressure go up, while the breathing gets disrupted – they usually hold their breath for a short time. As a result of stress, there is tension and restriction of movement so full breathing becomes impossible. Thus, the heart is working harder, causing blood to flow to the muscles, while there is not enough oxygen supply.

Breath preparation is fairly simple – at the first sign of stress, begin to breathe and accelerate your breathing in accordance with your heart rate. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Taking air in through the nose is very important. A full inhale through the nose is a sign of relaxation, while inhaling through the mouth tenses up the upper breathing muscles. Proper breathing helps to maintain the body in a straight and balanced position; it provides stability and allows you to act naturally with just enough power – this way, you are not acting emotionally or out of fear. Moreover, it promotes a conscious and calm psychological condition.

Proper breathing precedes the stress reaction and prevents it from developing. Since this type of breathing is conscious, it prevails over the unwanted unconscious reactions. As you accelerate your breathing, you gain muscle tone and readiness to move without the stress. It allows you to reach the state of readiness to engage comparable to your attacker very quickly in a controlled way, to catch up instantly to their level of readiness but without any damaging side effects to your health.

The surge of adrenalin under stress may enable you to react quickly, even without the breathing, but there is a big difference. You would be prone to injury and strain to all your body systems, and you will never gain true power and control. Proper breathing begins

to control your fear and then removes it all together. The end result of this practice is your body's readiness to move effectively without straining and injuries, and clear understanding of the situation.

Use breathing as the foundation for everything you do. Make sure your breathing continues no matter what. You will then be able to relax and restore your psychological balance. The best way to maintain smooth and continuous movement is by way of breathing. Holding your breath makes you interrupt movement. If you are forced to stop moving, then continuous breathing will lead you into movement again.

Posture And Movement

Maintain natural body position throughout all movements. Good posture keeps you relaxed and psychologically balanced, and helps your heart, lungs and nervous system to work effectively. Smooth, natural movements happen when the body is aligned properly. Alertness, sensitivity, reaction time, and the entire action potential is maximised and the chances of injuries are reduced.

Breathing will help you avoid tension and if tension is not holding you back, you will be able to move. The more mobile you are, the less pain you will experience. To develop intuitive body awareness it is good to practice moving different body segments independent of the rest of the body. With multiple punches, you will realise that pre-planned and pre-rehearsed techniques will not work, whereas breath patterns and free movements can be adapted to any unpredictable attacks and challenges.

Develop intuitive body movement that allows for biomechanical efficiency. Humans are inclined to always want to face a threat front on,

and yet our ventral surface is our most vulnerable surface, physiologically and psychologically. In reality, you may not know which direction an attack will come from, or you may not have time to orient yourself to the attack. You may not have time, or it may not be appropriate, to drop into your trained combat posture.

Use asymmetrical motion and intuitive body movement. Train to react from any position you find yourself in, and on any plane – standing, kneeling, sitting, supine or prone, ventral or dorsal, left or right, in the open or confined spaces, on the street or in a car – it is all the same if you can move and respond naturally. If you are comfortable with all these situational variables, then your psyche will not induce a fear state if you are suddenly confronted with a threat.

Timing

Dealing with aggressive subjects requires anticipating their movements and taking action before they harm you. For your anticipating contact to be effective, it has to be subtle. You cannot telegraph your actions, you must stay calm and relaxed. It is important to stay in a natural position without preparation or fear and tension. When you work that way, your opponents are not afraid of you. They are less prepared for your unexpected actions because you are in such a natural, calm and non-aggressive position. Thus, they relax and you have much more control over them.

There are three timings for dealing with an attack:

1 Before This stage involves dealing with intent – the person is 'thinking' of attacking, and 'planning' the attack in their psyche. There will

be signals that this is occurring, from subtle cues of verbal and non-verbal language, to small 'initiating' movements. The idea is to 'interrupt' the attack before it begins, allowing you to control the situation.

2 During

This stage involves dealing with motion – the person has commenced their attack, either through convergence of their body over distance or their limbs to strike. The timing of this phase is whilst the attack is in motion, but before it concludes (makes contact). The idea is to 'shortcut' the attack once it has started but before it is completed, preferably whilst the attacker is still in motion. At this stage, movement is fluid and balance can be easily affected. Also, with correct timing, energy use is very efficient.

3 After

This last stage involves dealing with the attack. You have missed the opportunity to take advantage of the previous two stages (due

to distance, awareness, etc.), and the person has actually managed to carry out their attack. You have not interrupted the intent or shortcut the motion, so the idea is to prevent the attack reaching a successful conclusion. This stage often induces the most fear and alarm, and for untrained people usually results in resorting to simple strength-based strategies, actively resisting the attack.

The earlier you deal with the attack, the safer you are and the simpler the strategies. Conversely, the later you leave it, the more people panic and the harder it can be to manage. Timing, like all aspects of combat, takes time to develop. It is directly related to experience, mindset and tension.

Officers should practice operational safety strategies regularly, in a realistic and appropriate manner and environment, coupled with the correct mindset, and using operational uniform and equipment. The most effective way to learn and train is to apply sound principles rather than

accumulate and copy pre-planned techniques. Life is rarely pre-rehearsed, so officers need to train in unexpected and unfamiliar situations.

Develop familiarity 'outside the comfort zone' and do not be afraid to fail in training. That is how effective learning occurs, and it will certainly make reality seem a lot less intimidating. Finally, officers should make their strategies natural and intuitive, in accordance with how human beings are designed, both physically and psychologically. After all, it is the one 'constant' in the operational environment ... you are using a body to protect a body against a body ... and knowledge is power.

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