

TOOLS TO COOL CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION

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Overview:

It is important to realize that no human being controls any other human being's behavior. Thus there are no "guaranteed" skills that would always de-escalate every situation. There ARE elements of build-up which are common to nearly all serious confrontations. The skills presented in this workshop are counter to those elements of buildup, and so make it more difficult for a confrontation to keep escalating. Since tension begets tension, one of the easiest ways for people build their own tension is if they can get tension coming back from someone else. An upset customer can build off the tension of fear as well as the tension of anger and belligerence. This presentation includes both non-verbal and verbal tools/anchors that can help maintain calm and still present a firm and strong demeanor in a tense situation.

Some Key Elements of Non-verbal Tools/Anchors:

STRONG BODY LANGUAGE - Have a "base" (position of legs and body imitates a pyramid, rather than an upside down pyramid), and be in a position where it is easy to take a deep breath (even if you don't choose to take one at that moment).

STONE OF VOICE - A quieter voice when trying to keep a situation from escalating is usually the best course, but in a situation that HAS escalated to an extreme, sudden loud behaviors might startle the aggressor enough to buy you some time and enable you to get to safety. In both instances your voice will be more effective if you vocalize from your diaphragm.

EMPHASIS OF VOICE - Be aware of possible negative effects from too much use of a questioning voice (always goes up at the end of a sentence), or a commanding voice (always goes down at the end of a sentence).

DISTANCE - Be aware of the physical and psychological importance of "handshake distance", and that moving or backing away does not have to look like "backing down."

YOUR BACK TOWARDS A HOSTILE PERSON - Be aware that it is easier for an upset person to physically escalate if you have your back to them.

OBLIQUE ANGLES - To approach/sit/stand in a "straight on" angle towards a person (180 degrees) can have a very different effect than using a slight angle (something less than 180 degrees). Be aware of the situations where each might be useful.

EYE CONTACT - To look at someone in a way that makes them feel acknowledged (without being too personal or possibly intrusive/provoking), use a more diffuse kind of eye contact. You can do this by looking at the more general area of the person's face that includes the eyes-to--shoulders, rather than looking just at the eyes).

Some Key Elements Of Verbal Tools/Anchors:

In a confrontation, people sometimes think they have to keep coming up with something new to say in order to keep the person from escalating. This comes from thinking that what you have to do is out-argue them. It is best to avoid arguments in these situations. Sometimes just restating the same thing with slight variations is the best course, because in a confrontation the person (consciously or unconsciously) is often trying to draw you into something, get a rise out of you, or get you off the track. When a confrontation is brewing, use statements and keep them simple. Do not give reasons or try to justify. That can leave room for argument, manipulation or intimidation. An easy way to cue yourself on these anchors is think "I need a vehicle to steer me through this touchy situation." The most common vehicle in this country is a car. So think of the acronym C. A. R.

C = Commonalities

Keep coming back to the common problem, the common policy, the common task or the common goal. Explain the procedures, guidelines or whatever if that seems helpful, but don't get drawn into argument or justifications. Try to keep yourself as separate as possible from those procedures and guidelines. Also try to stick to the facts and concrete behaviors in the situation and not get into personalities.

A = Acknowledgment or Attention

Acknowledging someone's opinions or feelings is different from agreeing with them. For example, to say "other people have felt the way you do" is only stating a fact, and it may help the person feel you are really listening. It is amazing how much a little acknowledgement can ease a situation, even if you still cannot give them what they want. If they tell you about a problem, restating it back to them lets them know you are listening to them. Asking questions to more fully understand the problem can also be useful this way.

R = Redirect

Suggesting other resources they could check out can do this. Asking questions can be acknowledging, but it can also be a way of redirecting their attention. Sometimes attempting to organize their thoughts with a response to a question can help draw people away from their emotions. If the person is amicable to sitting down that can help. Another way of redirecting is to create an interruption.

Most people who deal with confrontation have a style that leans heavily on one of these three and which feels most natural to them. It is good to know your strengths. It is also good to have an idea of something else you could try if your usual style isn't producing the desired results.

Conclusion:

This is not a method of memorizing response "A" to situation "53", response "Z" to situation "41", etc. It is not a one-size-fits-all method either. This method is intended to help you analyze situations and adapt the strengths of your unique personality toward successfully resolving them. While these skills do not guarantee you can stop someone from escalating, they are useful because they tend to: **1)** slow situations down, **2)** help you assess what IS going on with the other person, **3)** help you deflect violence/anger away from you, **4)** help you keep or get maneuvering room. That gives you a better chance of calming a situation down before violence erupts.

Mary Brandl is also the co-author of a book, DVD, & 3-volume video set, all are entitled <u><i>Scenarios In Self-Defense</i></u> . For more information, contact the web site or numbers/addresses listed below.
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SELF-DEFENSE: BASIC CONCEPTS

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The following are excerpts and adaptations from the book entitled *Scenarios In Self-Defense* by Mary Brandl and Anita Bendickson. To order a complete copy, send \$11.95 (plus 6.5% sales tax for Minnesota residents, 7% for Mpls. residents) and \$3.00 shipping (regardless of quantity). Make your check or money order to: BPS Communications (please do not send cash). Mail to the address listed above. For information on the DVD/video program please contact us through our web site or one of the numbers/addresses listed above.

What Is Self-Defense?

Self-defense is any available means of safely avoiding or escaping a potentially dangerous encounter. It needn't involve fighting, or even a direct physical encounter. Since no self-defense techniques are guaranteed, our goal is not to "win," but rather to get away from a potentially dangerous situation safely.

Psychology of Attacks---Disrupting the Attack Scenario

Most attackers have thought out their actions to some degree. They have developed a scenario - either conscious or unconscious - of how their attack will proceed. This is true whether the attacker is a stranger or someone you thought was a friend. This scenario is every attacker's security blanket, his or her assurance that the attack is going "well". By disrupting an attacker's scenario, you put yourself on more even ground with your attacker. You exploit the attacker's weaknesses and assert your own strength.

Attacks vary in seriousness (presence of weapons, degree of isolation, etc.) and in purpose (rape, mugging, discovery while burglarizing, etc.). Assessing the seriousness and purpose behind an attack will help you determine what means to use to act - whether to use physical, verbal or other forms of resistance.

Middle Ground Self-Defense---Act Early

Attackers need to get close to attack. The first part of their scenario depends on it. Most attackers' scenarios include ploys or approaches that allow them to get within hand-shaking distance...without signaling the potential victim that an attack is starting. Even on the occasions when an attacker is using a weapon, he or she will almost invariably move in *before* wielding a gun or knife. Usually the approach is casual: "Have you got a match?" "Do you have change for a dollar?" There are also many approaches which are non-verbal.

---Trust Your Feelings

Victims often report that something made them feel "uneasy" even before the attack began. This seems to be especially true when the assailant is a stranger. The most useful thing you can do to upset an attacker's scenario and regain the initiative is to *trust your feelings*. You don't need to wait to find out why you feel uneasy before acting!

---Set a Boundary

To interrupt a casual approach, set an unmistakable boundary using:

- **DISTANCE:**

If you don't feel right about a person or situation, get or keep some distance. Don't assume that an attacker will always be a stranger.

- **STRONG BODY LANGUAGE:**

If you can take a good, deep breath, you are probably in a strong body position. For the strongest position, place your feet slightly apart, with some space between them from side to side as well as from front to back. This is like having your heels on the diagonal corners of a square. Relax your joints. Place shoulders directly over your hips. You can look at someone without making it easy for them to talk to you by centering your vision in the triangle made up of the area between their eyes and shoulders.

- **ASSERTIVE VERBAL RESPONSES:**

If a verbal response is called for, using commands and statements in a firm but non-challenging tone is perhaps your most valuable response for ending a situation. Use simple statements and commands that refer only to what "I want" or "I don't want".

Physical Resistance---

While many situations can be averted early, there are times when physical resistance may be the only chance you have to get away safely. However, if you decide to respond physically, it is imperative that you make your strike as effective as possible. Use your strengths against the attacker's weaknesses and *give it everything you've got. Use all the speed and energy you can.* If you commit to a physical response, you must be willing to injure your attacker.

To use your body most effectively, you need a strong base, with your weight centered and low. (See "Strong Body Language" above.) You can either get into this position by stepping as you strike, or start from this position and rotate your hips and body into your strike.

---Your Arms as Weapons

To strike with your arms, hand or fist, bend your arm at the elbow and pull your fist back by your side, or around your head. You can unleash your energy by uncoiling your arm and body into a strike. Hard surfaces to strike with are your fist, fingers/nails, heel of your hand, edges of your hand, and elbows.

---Your Legs as Weapons

If you are stomping, coil the leg and drive the foot downward into your target. If you are kicking straight ahead, coil your leg and snap it out and back quickly for extra power. To kick backward, coil and drive the whole leg back into the target. Hard surfaces to use are your knees, ball of the foot, outside edge of the foot, and the heel.

---Targets

Regardless of an attacker's size or strength, he or she has weak areas. If you choose your target carefully, even a fairly weak blow can be very painful and potentially disabling. Your targets can be divided into three main body areas. Generally, the most serious targets are above the shoulders.

THE HEAD: Includes the eyes, temples, ears (boxing), nose, under the chin, and the front and sides of the throat. To remember, think of the five senses plus breathing.

MID-BODY: Includes the solar plexus, stomach, groin. Mid-body targets are usually less serious. To remember, continue to think of breathing and what interrupts breathing.

LOWER-BODY: Knees, shins, ankles, and instep. The knee is the most serious lower-body target. To remember, think of interrupting mobility.

To identify available targets and weapons, ask yourself: **What do I have free? What targets are available?**

Fear and Panic---Breathe Deeply and Visualize In Advance

Fear can actually be helpful. It gives you a burst of adrenaline. Panic is anything but helpful. It can keep you from thinking straight, considering your options, and acting decisively. If you start to feel afraid, take a couple of deep breaths. Although you don't need every option, visualize a few preferred self-defense options in advance. The more positive options you have considered, the more resources you'll have in a crisis. This is not paranoid thinking. It is prepared thinking.