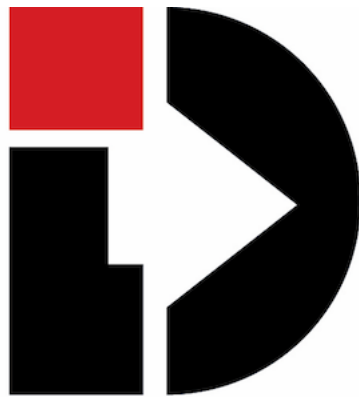


# Nice Ideas That Get People Killed



Chris Ranck-Buhr

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*Hand-to-Hand Combat Training in the Misinformation Age*

Chris Ranck-Buhr

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## Introduction

*Think of what you fear.*

I'm not asking this to make you afraid, or to be a fearmonger. I want you to be honest with yourself. What, in the realm of criminal violence, scares you? When you see it on the news or read about it, which story is the one you can't shake? Kidnapping at gunpoint... a random stabbing... rape and murder? The stuff that would scar you, horrible in a permanent way, or isn't survivable without giving back in kind—that's what gives me pause. That's the stuff I worry about. That's why I train.

I ask you to think about what scares you so you can have a clear picture of what you would be training for: is it unbridled brutality, or knives, or guns, or multiple people coming after you? Is it a particular scenario you've heard about, seen, or experienced? Once you know what you're training for, it gets easier to choose where to train, and how. It gives you a starting point as well as an end point—if you know what you don't want to have happen, it becomes obvious what kind of training will prepare you for that problem.

I'm going to bet that when you thought about what scares you, what *really* scares you, you didn't think about a fight over a bar stool or a parking space, or an argument with a drunk, or whether or not you could prevail in the ring. But the truth is that this is what most self-defense training prepares you for. That's not a bad thing—it's useful to know how to handle all these situations, and even to be victorious in competition. It's just that training with these goals in mind is not the same as training to prevent your own murder—the two skill sets don't have very much overlap. Wrestling is not killing and vice versa; serial killers don't use elaborate submission holds to kill their victims. They use violence.

It can be difficult, if not impossible, to tell the difference. If you're afraid of violence, chances are you don't know how to do it; again, not necessarily a bad thing. No one wants real violence to be a part of their daily life, their everyday experience. We avoid it by successfully navigating the social realm, talking our way out of bad situations when we can, leaving when we can't—it very rarely comes to blows. We all have a natural aversion to real violence.

The goal of this book is simple: to give you the information you need to make an informed decision on how to train for violence. Of course, we hope you'll train with us, but more important is that you understand *why*. We're going to demystify violence: show you what everyone wishes it was, what it most certainly isn't, and what it really is.

In the end I want you to be able to honestly say what you really want to train for and have a clear understanding of what you need to do to accomplish that goal.

## **I: Violence — What You Don't Know Could Kill You**

Violence is the way of life. It's not *a* way of life (or at least not a life that's very good, or long for that matter); it's a simple fact of life. We live by killing. The meat we eat, the leather in your shoes, it all comes to us through violence. It's the way predators acquire prey. It's the way powerful nations secure resources for their populations. It's also the way the common criminal gets what he wants. The tool of violence is useful to the righteous and wicked alike; it's the same tool no matter who is wielding it or why. Violence is.

Our ancestors lived and died by violence—go back far enough and violence becomes a feature of everyday life. Whether hunting game or driving off rivals, it was all about the sharp stick in the eye, either giving it or getting it. All those who came before us worked hard—and fought—to build a world where violence would become more and more rare. A world where killing and dying were not a part of everyday life, where common experience did not involve personally slaying animals in order to eat, or personally killing rivals in order to secure resources.

Believe it or not, this is the world we live in today.

It is possible to spend your entire life without ever using violence or killing. It is possible to live decades without ever seeing or touching a dead body. These two facts would have been unheard of—ridiculous—to our ancestors. To put it bluntly, we have lost our connection to violence. That's not a bad thing when it comes to everyday living—I really don't want to have to hunt to eat and fight to live as a part of my normal work week. It would be time-consuming and inconvenient. So life *is* better this way... until you run into whatever it is that scares you, that person or situation that could end up being permanently life-altering or deadly. Life is better without violence—until someone tries to murder you. Then it's unlikely you'll survive without it.

What's a modern, civilized person to do?

### **What We'd Like Violence to Be**

American culture is obsessed with violence—at least, that's what we're told. In reality we're obsessed with the idea of violence as dramatic conflict resolution, but not with the destruction of human beings itself. This idea is most easily seen in American football. We relish the hard hits—we stand up and cheer when the quarterback gets sacked by a 250-pound linebacker moving at speed. That quarterback got *schooled*—he got what was coming to him, our linebacker showed him what was what! But if that linebacker tripped, fell and broke the quarterback's knee—bent his leg backwards until it snapped with an audible *crack* picked up by the sideline mics, no one stands up to cheer. In fact, we recoil, bring our hands to our faces, avert our eyes. We gasp and groan and feel it in our guts. It's not violence we love, it's the drama of competition.

Our entertainment says a lot about what we think of violence. Much of it reinforces our base misunderstandings while simultaneously portraying it the way we would like it to be—the way we wish things were—instead of how they really are. In the stories we love, told through movies and television, a kind of “sporting” violence is used as dramatic conflict resolution. It's exciting when the hero prevails because they're just plain better than the bad guy—when they “school” the villain and show him what's what. That's violence we can cheer for. Movies that portray violence in all its stark reality are often controversial, force people to flee the theaters

and just plain don't make as much money as the ones with dramatically interpreted or "fantasy" violence.

Give us a fantasy that reinforces our disconnected notions of violence and we will cheer; show us unalloyed reality and we will turn away. We want the hero to prevail because they're faster, stronger, or more clever, with nice hair and good teeth. We want them to look cool with flashy techniques and a cutting quip on their lips. That's something we would all pay to see, pay to be that person, if only in our minds, for a little while.

Once we're sold the dream, we seek to live it. We're not just content with watching the hero be cool—we want to do what they're doing and get some of that cool for ourselves. We want to train to do what we see in the movies, and get that training in a way that reinforces what we want violence to be. We find this in the dojo or the ring, both places where violence is transformed into a contest that yields to the biggest, fastest, strongest, and most skilled. Here training time is armor; the longer you train, the more likely you are not to be killed. Think of the vaunted black belt—now there's someone who can take care of themselves, right? You may be no good right now, as a mere white belt, but then no one expects you to be any good at this level. But the black belt; once you got that you'd be unbeatable. Criminals be damned and killers quail. The longer you train, the more invulnerable you become... and once you strap that black belt on, well, you're practically bulletproof.

In the training environment of the dojo or ring we're told to think of the streets, and so we extrapolate and project our expectations and training out the doors and into those streets, laying them over the common criminal. We expect them to move like we do, present the attack profiles we train. We expect killers to fight like martial artists or combat sport competitors. And so we train to meet them, blow-for-blow, a technique for every problem. If we stack up enough of them, blocks and counterattacks and clever maneuvers, joint locks, compliance and submission holds, we'll be able to counter each thrust and parry of the bad guy, come back over the top and send him reeling. Just like in the movies.

Because if it works in here, it's gotta work Out There. Right?

The problem is that this entire process is a lie. What we want violence to be and what it really is are two very different things. When violence is presented to us in a palatable format with all the "nasty bits" trimmed off, we enjoy it. We view it through the lens of intermale aggression, of social dominance, as a contest or a game. As social animals we find such interactions compelling, and eagerly seek them out. When we wish violence was not awful, our desires are reflected in our art and entertainment, and so that wish gets reinforced and fulfilled. In essence, we program ourselves to think of violence as competition.

Think of it this way: while most people would be more than happy to pay to see an exciting action movie, far fewer would be willing to pay to see an actual film of someone being murdered. And of those who would, almost none would be "happy" or "excited" about it. At least no one sane. While we love to empathize with the hero as they deal out social dominance, we feel no kinship with a murderer. One is entertainment, the other, sickening reality. When they're put side-by-side, the differences are horribly obvious.

Except when they aren't. Once we're programmed to view violence through the social lens, we then tend to see the murder as an act of social dominance—and now we are truly and royally screwed. Now when we look at the news—the crippling assaults, stabbings, shootings—we see those as social dominance problems, and so we go looking for social dominance solutions. Solutions we find in the dojo or the ring.

Think about the sparring match—two competitors pad-up and square off, give each other hard stares, their postures both aggressive and warning. Then they go after each other, shouting and striking, lashing out with arms and legs alike, clashing, rebounding, dancing back and charging again, perhaps to clinch and drop to the ground, rolling for position... This looks an awful lot like a similar behavior we can see in other primates—the intermale aggression contests of the great apes. These sorts of displays make us feel good. They are familiar, comfortable, you could even say we are hardwired for it. Such behavior is deeply satisfying for us, especially if you were the one who came out on top, the one who moved up a peg or two on the social ladder. Giving someone the hard hit, or schooling them, showing them what's what *just feels right*. It's great watching it—and it's even better being the one doing it.

Sparring would be great training for violence if violence worked like that. But violence isn't a social interaction—it isn't about social dominance or position. It's about destruction and killing. When you look at the news, you don't see sparring. Not when killing is happening. There's no social display, no back and forth, no squaring off. It's one person doing it to the other. And the person doing it is usually the one who survives. The person getting it done to them, not so much. Violence is terribly one-sided. It's the quarterback's shattered knee. You know it when you see it because you can feel it in your gut.

If you are presented with a social dominance problem—like the disputed ownership of a barstool—then an intermale aggression display is one possible solution. (Not necessarily the best solution, but a possibility nonetheless. It takes a lot less effort to use other social skills, like talking it out or simply walking away, than it does to engage in the shouting and bluff charges of monkey politics.) We have a 1:1 correspondence here—a social dominance problem, solved through social display. Not optimal, but still appropriate. The right tool for the job.

We still haven't run into violence here, and when we do, everything goes to hell. Instead of arguing over a barstool, let's imagine he wants to murder you. Is a social display really an appropriate response? Is shouting and bluff charging going to keep the knife out of your neck? If he's not playing the game, matching you in kind, then the answer is no. If he is unconcerned with status and focused purely on killing you, then you've got a violence problem. And that requires a violence solution.

## II: So What Are You Training For?

No matter what you're training for, somewhere in the back of your mind you like to think that it's going to apply one way or another to the problem of violence. You've either been told this by the people you train with, or it's implied—after all, you're training to punch and kick and criminal violence can involve punching and kicking. So you're all set, right?

The fact of the matter is this: you are training to do whatever it is you're training to do. Now I know that sounds like Zen master semantic antics, but it's the truth. You don't get better at one thing by training for something else. If, for instance, you want to get good at playing basketball, you should play basketball, not swim laps. While swimming laps will improve your overall fitness and cardiovascular endurance—things which can improve your hoops game—they are only tangentially associated with the skill of putting that ball through the hoop and scoring points. To get better at that you need to get your hands on a ball and spend time on a court with a bunch of other people. In other words, you get better at playing the game by playing the game.

No matter what your current or past training, it's easy to figure out what you're training for—just look at what it is you spend most of your training time *doing*. Whatever that thing is, that's what you're preparing for. If the majority of that time is physical conditioning (running, push-ups, sit-ups, jumping rope, etc.), then you're training to get in shape. If it's spent working over a heavy bag, you're conditioning yourself for that task. If most of your time is going one-on-one with another person as a staged competition—that is, strength against strength, speed against speed, skill against skill with rules or limits on what you're allowed to do—then you're training to compete within those boundaries. If the bulk of your training is directly related to your goal, e.g., if you wish to be a victorious competitor you're best served by spending as much time competing in the ring as possible, then you truly are all set.

You're only going to run into trouble when your training doesn't match your desired operational area; if someone wants to be a competitor but spends most of their time on physical conditioning, they're going to get taken out by a more skilled and experienced practitioner. They may be an amazing physical specimen who can run laps around the other person, but unless the competition is for sport endurance, they're going to lose to the person who spent most of their time in the ring with worthy opponents. They're going to lose to the person who trained for the win.

There is no magical transference of skill from one area to another just because you suddenly realize it's a life-or-death situation. When someone comes after you to kill you, you're going to do whatever it is you spent most of your time training to do. If you trained for conditioning, you're way out of your depth. If you trained to spar you'll go toe-to-toe and try to spar a murderer. If you trained for competition you'll be stuck working within the rules while he's free to do whatever he wants. If that training wasn't for violence, for true “anything goes” action, for maiming, crippling, and killing, you will constantly be one step behind—and when it's life or death, second place isn't just first loser, it's dead.

If you want to be good at a thing, you have to train for that thing. Training for competition or an arcane art does not prepare you for criminal violence. No more than training for violence prepares you for the ring—it absolutely doesn't. My training has not prepared me to match the physical conditioning and skill of today's top MMA competitors; nor has it given me the balance, poise, flexibility, or skill of the martial artist. I have only trained to maim, cripple, and kill. More than 90% of my training time is spent on the mats with at least one human being (preferably more at once) accessing targets the way a marksman practices putting bullets right



where they want them, practicing gouging eyes, crushing throats, breaking knees, necks and spines, slamming bodies down into the mats and then crippling them to keep them down. I practice with knives, batons, and firearms the way I'm most likely to see them on the street. The end result makes me useless in the ring and I'll never win any trophies for beautiful form. But then, that's not what I'm training for. I'm training to do the things above to someone who wants to kill me.

Take a good hard look at what you spend most of your training time doing. Does it match up with what worries you? Are you training to handle the person or situation you fear most? Or are you training for something completely different? I can honestly say that every moment of my training is spent working on the problem that bothers me—taking a killer to nonfunctional, whether that means he's unconscious or dead. I can do either because it's all I spend my time practicing.

Can you honestly say the same?

### **Nice Ideas That Get People Killed**

There are a lot of “feel good” training methodologies out there, that is, training designed to interface with your natural desires and predilections. It's much easier to convince someone to train, and spend money, if you can hook into their base animal desire for comfort and reinforcement of their hopes. But no matter how hard we wish violence were different, the facts remain. And when wishful training runs into hard reality, people die. Here are some nice ideas—things that would be great if only reality would play along—and the problems they give rise to:

*Bigger-stronger-faster will make you immune to violence.*

There's nothing wrong with improving your physical fitness—in fact, I heartily recommend it. But exercise and conditioning should never be done in lieu of actual training for what it is you want to do. Calisthenics and related fitness work are often taught as time-fillers to keep you busy for the better part of what's supposed to be a training hour. Such activities get sold to you as somehow providing protection from violence—that if only you were bigger, stronger, and faster you would be less likely to be harmed. The truth is no amount of push-ups or jogging is going to keep a knife out of your neck. The only thing that does is doing it to the other person first. Get fit to get fit, but don't confuse fitness with the skill of violence.

*Training will make you immune to violence.*

This is the real reason people train—no one wants to get punched, kicked, stabbed, or shot. There are plenty of systems out there that claim to make you impervious to such things. The sad fact is that nothing can make you bulletproof. All hyperbole aside, there's no training that can make you immune to violence, everyone is always susceptible. This is a bitter pill to swallow, but if you flip it around it's actually a very positive message—it means that that ultimate bad guy you've built up in your head breaks just like everybody else. No matter how big, mean, or well-trained, everyone's eye comes out of the skull the same way. And the results are identical—blindness and mind-shattering injury.

If I tell you that once trained you'll never get punched, and so you train and then you get punched in the head and knocked down, what's that going to do to your ability to operate under those conditions? Your first thought will be, “Omigod—it's not working!” You'll begin shutting down mentally right when it's most critical that you act decisively. If, instead, I tell you

the truth, that in life-or-death violence you should expect to get punched, kicked, stabbed, and yes, maybe even shot—but that if you find you can still think and move, you can injure the man and end it in your favor, then if any of those things occur your first response will be to injure the man and put him down for more injury. You will have correctly trained for the only response that can save your life in that situation.

No one wants to get punched, kicked, etc.—if I had the choice I'd pick “no thank you,” too—but in violence you don't always get to pick. Correct training doesn't make you immune to violence—none can—but rather it gives you the fighting chance you need to survive such things. Accepting the reality of the situation and training accordingly means you won't shut down in the face of violence—you'll get busy doing the work required, injuring the other person.

*The right technique will handle the problem.*

For each problem a technique, right? If he comes with the knife *like so*, you can counter with anti-knife technique 143-D. And as long as you've memorized and drilled the other 142 techniques and their variations, you're all set. While this is a neat idea in theory—and in the training environment—in the real world you're very rarely going to have the luxury of seeing it coming and have the time to rummage through all of your counters to find the exact right one, let alone execute it. You can't counter the fact that you've already been stabbed. And if you've been trained to work that way, you'll always be one step behind the person who's busy trying to murder you. That's an awful place to be. It also places your chances of survival squarely in the toilet. Violence is not about set patterns and will very often veer off in an unforeseen direction, leaving your brilliant technique in the dust. What you need instead is training that recognizes the chaos inherent in violence and teaches you how to mitigate it, how to act using the principles that are always present, no matter the situation, and ignore the things that may or may not be there. In other words, training that's not about what he's trying to do to you, but all about what *you're* doing to *him*.

*Training for profiles you'd like to see.*

I'd really like it if violence started with a killer walking up to me and sedately taking hold of my lapel. Or getting into a fighting stance. Or brandishing the knife from a distance. Or if everyone in a multi-man situation waited their turn for me to get to them. These are the profiles I'd rather see. They're comfortable, and give you time and space to be warned, get ready, and figure out what to do next. Unfortunately, people don't come at you like this when they want to kill you. They come hard, fast, and tear right into you. They knock you down, they put the blade into you without your even knowing there was a knife involved, they come all at once instead of one at a time. If you train for unrealistic profiles, you're setting yourself up to be overwhelmed with the ferocity and totality of the real thing. You're setting yourself up to be surprised.

As uncomfortable as reality is, you're better off training for it. Instead of working on the profiles you're comfortable with, you want to train for the ones that you're most likely to see, the ones that victims of violence actually report. You want to prepare for the worst. It's okay to hope for the best, just don't count on it.

*You can convince a killer to quit.*

This is a truly nice idea, the idea that with the right technique and the application of a little bit of pain you can change a murderer's mind. It's nice to think that, and it would be a better

world if it were true, but the fact of the matter is that the only reliable way to dissuade a killer is to shut him off—either cripple him to the point where he can't move, knock him unconscious, or kill him.

This is the classic mistake of confusing antisocial dominance behaviors with asocial violence. In the antisocial realm—the screaming match, the cuffing and grappling of intermale aggression, in short, the bar fight—you can use painful joint locks and pain-compliance holds to convince a man to quit. If he understands (even unconsciously) that the penalty for giving up is purely social, and he is willing to accept that penalty in the face of pain or as a recognition of dominance, then such techniques amount to asking, albeit physically, for him to submit. If he accepts the bargain—capitulating to put an end to the pain and humiliation—then we have a happy ending. The problem was social, he went antisocial, you used pain to ask him to stop, and so he quits. (You have successfully “kicked his ass.”) Even if everyone doesn't go home happy, at least they're all alive. Your training has seen you through yet again.

Where this all breaks down is when the problem isn't social in nature—when we're not doing the dance of intermale aggression, but instead the work of murder. Madmen don't quit. And if they do, you can't be sure it's genuine or if just they're using social convention to manipulate you into a vulnerable position, to get *you* to stop and drop your guard. Asking a murderer to quit, even physically, is unreliable simply because he's not playing by the rules. He may be completely uninterested in social dominance, at least in a way that sane people understand it. In our version, we're satisfied when the opponent is cowed and slinks off, tail tucked. The killer, on the other hand, may be looking for a pile of corpses.

Just as killing is inappropriate when facing down the embalmed and emboldened over a barstool, pain compliance and submission holds are inappropriate when facing a killer. Jerks can be handled in a thousand different ways; killers only one.

*Good thing The Rules apply everywhere!*

This is the belief that the rules you train under—everything from the explicit rules of the ring to the implicit rules of the training environment, and even the rules of polite society at large—are present everywhere else at all times. Everyone likes to believe that their training is directly applicable to violence, even if the instructor never makes such claims. After all, the reason many of us seek out training in the first place is because we saw or heard of something that made us realize it might be useful to know how to hurt someone, to have a little bit of knowledge of what to do in violent conflict. You wouldn't pay good money and take the effort to carve time out of your schedule if you didn't think that need was being met.

Regardless of the kind of training, whether classic self-defense, sport fighting, or traditional martial art, you want to believe that it is a clear reflection of reality, that you're spending your time modeling the true mechanics of violence. In other words, that the way you're doing it is how it really goes down. You need to be careful here to keep from getting caught short. The only rules in violence are the laws of physics, and how they affect physiology. There are no rules of engagement, and nothing, no matter how ugly, awful and/or distasteful, is off-limits. That's all there is to it. It's just sundered anatomy, one person hurting another and then taking full advantage of the injured man. Any rule, convention or assumption beyond the simple facts of violence will slow you down and put you a half-step behind.

*Regardless of my training, when it comes down to life or death, I will be motivated enough to become a killing machine.*

This is the idea that the crucible of lethal threat will burn off all the crap and impurities and forge you, instantaneously, into highly-motivated whirling dervish of destruction. The problem is, you do what you train, period. There is no magical transference of skill under threat of death. If anything, your performance will be degraded, worse than it is in training. And so you have to hope that you spent your time actually practicing what it is you wish to get done in violence, namely taking out the man who wants to kill you.

It's not enough to think about it, or talk it to death. If you don't actually practice how to hurt people, put them down so they can't get back up, and then take them to nonfunctional (crippled, unconscious, or dead), you're not going to do those things when it matters most. Being told to "go for the eyes" is not the same as doing it every practice session. Thinking about how to apply a certain technique "for real" is not the same as making it a physical habit for yourself. If you would like to be able to gouge eyes, crush throats, and break necks when your life depends on it, you need to model those things every chance you get. As you practice, so shall you perform. Even under threat of death.

Think back to what motivated you to train—that terrible news item, or prior experience, or just the idea of someone scary coming after you with a total disregard for social convention, the sanctity of life, or any rules whatsoever. Think back to that clear picture I asked you to focus on at the beginning, the thing that sent you to the dojo, the gym, or enticed you to seek out and read this work. If that one thing is to out-compete an athlete, or to dominate the social arena, I can't help there. There are literally tens of thousands of other places you can find training to help you handle those problems. If that's what you're looking for, I encourage you to seek them out. Just as you wouldn't bring a handgun to a wrestling match, what I can do for you would not meet your needs. But if that one thing that scares you is violence, raw, brutal and unrelenting, the kind of situation that doesn't yield to words or cleverness or athleticism—if it's facing a killer that you're worried about—that's all we do. We don't train anything else.

### III: When Violence Is the Answer

Though it's rare, when the need does arise, nothing else will do. When what should have been an average Sunday afternoon shopping trip explodes into chaos as a killer makes himself known in your midst or a classmate snaps during what should have been a humdrum lecture or someone simply chooses you as prey on your everyday walk from office to car, what should ordinarily be unthinkable now becomes necessary. Violence is useless until it isn't—then it's the only tool for the job.

The good news is that outside of moral or psychological considerations, violence is easy to do. The mechanics of injury are simple and straightforward. Literally anyone can do it. You don't have to be big, strong, or mean; you just have to be willing. This is the truth that the criminal sociopath knows all too well, that the lines we scribe to delineate what is good and bad behavior, the lines between what is socially acceptable and what is not are drawn in sand. They are truly guidelines. Sane, socialized people recognize them and respectfully stay on the suggested side; cruel people see the lines and willfully step across when it suits them; the insane are blind to the lines.

The principles of violence—the mechanics that make it work for the criminal, for you, for anyone—are easy to learn, easy to do, and are always present in every successful use of violence, no matter who is using it. First and foremost is injury; when two people go after each other, nothing changes until someone gets hurt. The person who gets broken tends to go down and become helpless to stop the person who hurt them from doing it again and again. This is why your goal in violence is to be the person doing the injuring, every time.

You are much more likely to cause serious injury if you go after anatomical features of the human body that have an important job to do, like the eyes, throat, or knees. Parts of the body that would debilitate the man should they end up gouged, crushed, or torn. We refer to these important anatomical features as *targets*. It's also important to note that these are the parts of the body that turn up time and again in sports injury literature; they are the things that tend to get wrecked when people run into people and people run into the ground. Both things you're going to want to do to him.

The human body is in many ways very resilient—to overcome this you need to strike these targets with your entire mass. Instead of just scratching at his eyes, you need to cram all five of your fingers through his eye sockets as hard as you can, with all of your body weight behind it, as if to make your fingers come out the other side of his head. They won't, of course, but his eyes are going to get ruined in the process. This is very different from reaching, slapping, or pushing. You're going to put your whole self into everything you do—think of it as hitting him with a baseball bat that weighs as much as you, every single time.

Once you've injured him it's time to pour it on and take advantage of the injury. If you stomp his knee and break it, dropping him, now's the time to kick him in the head as hard as you can as he tries to get up. And then stomp on his throat. You need to maintain a constant state of attack, injury after injury, until he's nonfunctional. You're not done until he is.

This is the nuts and bolts of violence, easily seen in every successful instance of the tool. The rest is just detail work. It doesn't get any more complicated than “rock to the head”—further training beyond the base principles just gives you more options for applying them. It doesn't matter what kind of problem in violence you face—multiple people, grappling, knives, batons, guns—the answer is always the same: *Injure him now.*

## The “Kick the Baby” Problem

The truth about violence is uncomfortable. It’s much easier to convince someone to train if you pad that truth, minimize it, and focus on aspects that are comfortable, comforting and speak to our innate desires for violence to be nicer and easier than it really is. In other words, training tailored to appeal to our desire for social interaction and dominance. A spirited sparring match with a comrade in arms is much more appealing than practicing stomping a downed man to death. The first one sounds like fun—the second one makes people feel uneasy. As it should.

I like to call this the “kick the baby” problem—training for violence means asking the learner to do something both morally reprehensible and naturally sickening. If we can successfully hide the baby, and kick a soccer ball instead, everyone will sign up and have a great time kicking the ball around. The truth is, to be successful at violence you have to hurt people, and then take full advantage of the fact they’re hurt—doing things that religion, society, and your mom have spent your entire life telling you not to do. Things that naturally sicken any sane human being. Inhumane and inhuman things.

To deny this fact is to lie about the basic nature of how and why violence works, to ignore what makes the criminal sociopath so deadly successful. It’s the lie we’re willing to pay for because it makes us feel better about what it is we know deep down we’re doing.

Violence is ugly and awful; you’ll never hear me say otherwise. I could sugarcoat it, pad it up, make it more palatable by using terms like “self-protection” and telling you you’re the plucky defender who will vanquish the foe in the most honorable way possible, with pain compliance, joint locks, and submission holds. Or a nifty hand-waving technique. Subduing the bad guy with nothing permanent or horrible to contemplate. But that would be a lie.

The facts of what works in violence—what the “winners” do to survive—show that your best bet is to injure the man, seriously, take him down to the ground, brutally, and then break more and more things inside of him until he can no longer function.

It works the same way with firearms—if you talk about having a gun for self-defense, it nicely skirts the fact that what you’ll do with that gun is shoot somebody to death. You’ll put as many bullets into him as you can to perforate organs, tear open blood vessels, and shatter bones. Indeed, to injure the man, seriously, take him down to the ground, brutally, and then break more and more things inside of him until he can no longer function.

But it doesn’t make you feel good to think about it this way.

When caught between trying to put a palatable spin on violence to make it more appealing and telling the truth about it, I’ll always go for the truth. The lie has a way of biting you in the ass—you’ll do fine with the lie until what you really need is violence. If you’re facing down drunks or fighting over parking spaces you’ll probably do just fine. End up in the middle of the next mass shooting, watching the killer reload, and you’re out of your depth. The one thing that could see you through—the tool of violence—you never really trained for. You may have thought about it, you may have talked it to death, but if you never actually practiced doing it you’re going to get caught short.

The truth is hard, but can save your life. The lie is far more seductive and comforting. Most people don’t want to hear the truth, to have their darkest fears confirmed. They would much rather pay for the lie and be comforted. I’m not saying you should find a way to enjoy being horrified. I’m asking you to be an adult and take responsibility for yourself and your loved ones by accepting the reality of the situation and training accordingly instead of wishing it weren’t so. Believe me when I tell you I wish it were otherwise myself. The fact is that if the problem of violence could be solved with something other than more violence, don’t you think humanity

would have already figured out what that elusive thing was? If the lie were true, war wouldn't be so god-awful and law enforcement officers wouldn't need to carry guns. Murder would be rare.

Unfortunately we don't live in that world. The choice in this one is to accept the facts and train accordingly or simply hope for the best. I don't know about you, but when it comes to matters of life or death, I'd rather be skilled than lucky.

## **Why Train?**

In the end, you train for violence for the same reason you'd buy a handgun. You don't buy a handgun to solve social problems, or to do things that are nice or comfortable to people. You buy a handgun because you recognize that it might be a useful thing to have the ability to shoot someone to death should the need arise. No sane person is hoping for such a situation, or looking forward with relish for the opportunity to kill someone, however justified in the eyes of law it may be, with a gun. It's an awful thing to contemplate, but if you're adult about it and ready to accept personal responsibility for your own safety and well-being (as well as that of those who depend on you), then the awfulness of violence calls for the awfulness of being prepared to give back in kind. In other words, given the insanity of violence it makes sense to be able to kill a killer. (In fact, such a thing makes no sense anywhere else.)

So you don't expect shooting someone to death to be nice, comfortable, or comforting. Why then, would you expect training to do the work of a bullet with your bare hands to be any different? Violence is ugly, regardless of the medium of delivery—bullets, knives, baseball bats, fists and boots... the work and the results are the same.

Because we teach violence—how to cripple and kill without the sugarcoating and padding to make you feel better about it—it's not comfortable, nice, or sporting. It's not about feeling good playing social dominance games. It's about claiming your birthright as a predator and preparing to hunt and kill madmen. Our training is not for children, or those unwilling to take responsibility for their own well-being, or the unresolved. It's for adults who are dedicated to living, surviving, and winning in the face of the unthinkable.

No matter where you might place yourself in that spectrum, everyone can benefit from knowing what to do when faced with violence. Most of the time such knowledge will be absolutely worthless to you—and I sincerely hope that the need for it never arises across the span of your entire life—but in the rare instances when you do need it, much like a handgun in the right place, at the right time, nothing else will see you through.

## **The Injury Dynamics Difference**

Training people to survive—and win—in violent conflict is deadly serious business. We understand that if we're wrong, people die. This base assumption is the foundation for everything we do. Not everyone feels this way, however—there is a wide variety of training choices in the self-defense world, some better than others. With all the advertising noise they generate it can be hard to figure out which is which—who has your interests at heart and who doesn't; who can truly give you the skills to prevail and who could be endangering your life.

To help you make an informed decision, you need to know the things that we do differently, what sets us apart from our competition and why. For starters, we are a team with nothing to prove. Your success is our sole motivation, and to that end we do our best to give you principles you can use, based on the observable facts of violence. We listen to you and use your feedback

to improve our methods. This relationship benefits both of us equally—if we get better at training you, you get more of what you need to survive—and win.

### *A Team, Not a Guru*

A single person can have some good ideas, but without editorial oversight, or, more bluntly, “no-men”, that one person’s vision will tend to the myopic. They’ll see what they like to see, what’s easy for them, personally, to do. Without other points of view to provide critical challenge, that one guy is stuck with himself.

Where things really go to hell is when the cult of personality forms around him and he starts to believe his own press. Now he’s not just stuck with himself, but on himself. His point of view is set in stone, and anyone learning from him is really just learning what works for the guru. He may be able to pull it off because of his unique set of physical attributes and skills, but the question is, can you?

If you can’t, and he can’t show you how without changing your physical attributes to match his (if only you were bigger, faster, stronger), then what’s the point? He may be able to survive violent conflict, but if he can’t show you a clear path to that goal then you end up being nothing more than a faceless number in his ego-stroking throng. And that’s not the reason you got involved in the first place.

He may be brilliant and charismatic and impressively skilled but if he can’t swallow his ego and work to make you better than he is (or, at least, better than he was at your level) then he’s taking your money, wasting your time and, worst of all, endangering your life. And all you get in return is the opportunity to bask in his brilliance and charm with the implied promise that maybe, just maybe, some of it will rub off on you. If you’re lucky.

While not every guru is a charlatan, the above path is deeply grooved and well-trod in the self-defense “industry”. We’ve watched good, caring people inadvertently fall into it and get stuck there. Even those starting out with the best intentions can end up enthroned atop a pyramid of well-meaning hero-worshippers. And that typically spells the end of any kind of meaningful innovation or evolution of thought, process, and training. When this happens, the people on the bottom are the ones who lose out.

This is why I made the conscious decision not to be a guru. Sure, I lead the work, and in that leadership role I am the recognizable face and speaker for that work. But as an instructor I knew that my singular point of view and personal skill set would not be enough to cover everyone because no one person, no matter how skilled, can. The seriousness of the work made that unacceptable. I trained up like-minded experts and gathered a team of conscientious, highly-skilled instructors, some of whom were also physicians, scientists, engineers, veterans, writers, and thinkers. People who knew how to kill with their bare hands, and could communicate that skill to others. A pack of no-men (and women) to provide critical insight and peer review. A hundred years of experience instead of just a single point of view.

As a group, we are able to combine all of our skills and experience to make sure that you can survive—and win—in violent conflict, and make it back home alive. Regardless of your personal challenges, we can find a way to make sure you get the skill. And you can rest assured that you’re not getting one person’s take on what works best for them alone, but rather what will work best for you—when it really, truly matters.



### *Nothing to Prove*

We had already completed full careers of doing this professionally before we stepped onto the world stage in 2002. We literally achieved everything we thought we wanted to do with this stuff. My instructor, Jerry Peterson, trained elite military groups all over the globe, federal agencies and law enforcement units, corporate security teams, as well as thousands of civilians. While I got a small taste of that, I really dove into the work of producing qualified instructors, ending up with 53 to date, nine of them Master Instructors with more than 10 years of experience each.

We had accomplished and experienced enough to fill a whole other book—a book of total awesomeness, if you ask any of us. Of course, I'm being sarcastic. Maybe.

After almost 20 years, I thought I was done. I was in the process of hanging up my spurs and looking for that “second act” in my American life.

But this work has a way of pulling you back in. It's a subject that almost everybody wants to know at least a little bit about. Many people were disappointed that we were calling it done; we began getting requests from individuals and groups to come out and do “just one more” training. But “just one more” leads to the next one, and before we knew it, we were pretty much full-time again. In the end we just kept going, training for 30 years now, under no fewer than five corporate banners.

So what does any of this, as “impressive” as it may seem, have anything to do with you? First off, it means we don't have anything to prove. We already got that out of our system. We're over all the chest-thumping, the posturing, the playing the tough guy with the chip on his shoulder. In fact, the whole reason we felt done in the first place is because we'd proved everything there was to prove. We trained people, they ran into deadly violence and made it back alive, whole—and victorious. Time and time again.

“Nothing to prove” means we can focus on you. You can be sure we're not out there to show off, or collect admirers, or find out if what we're doing really works. We don't have to be here—we *want* to be here. We want to be here for one reason, and one reason only: we want to give you the skills you need to prevail in the face of violence. Period.

The other thing you get is our experience. Injury Dynamics is not a fly-by-night start-up that's experimenting on you. We're not freshly-minted black belts with a couple of years of teaching experience (which turns out to be the same year just repeated a couple of times). We've been doing this for 30 years—every one of those a unique experience—it's never been the same twice. That rich vein of experience is what we mine to bring you the principles and methods you need to save your own life.

We have nothing to prove, and the only reason we're still here is because of you.

### *We Actually Care*

We view training you for violent conflict as seriously as teaching someone how to swim. On the surface the two might not appear to be related—violence is far more dire than goofing around in a swimming pool, after all. The common thread is this: if the instructor fails to impart the skill, the client could die. In swimming, the end result is a client who thinks they know how to swim while they really can't—a false confidence that can end in drowning. In violence, the result is a client who thinks they know how to hurt people, but really doesn't—a false confidence that can lead to their own murder.

This basic assumption informs and drives everything we do in Injury Dynamics. In fact, it's the reason we do it at all. We're not in it for the money, or the ego-stroke, or to be international

superstar badasses—we're in it for you, to make sure you have the skills to make it back home alive. When we train a group of 50 we don't see it as a single, anonymous mass; we see 50 individuals who each need to get it done right, and right now. We know we'll only have so much time with you—we have to assume we'll never see you again, that you'll have to rely on what we do at that moment for the rest of your life. We make that time count for you.

When I'm instructing I have to look you in the eye and know I'm not lying. I have to be sure that no matter how much time I get to train you, you walk out that door knowing how to injure a man, drop him, and make him stay there. Otherwise I literally can't sleep at night.

At our regular classes in San Diego, we thought it would be a good idea to let people come in for a free, hour-long orientation session. The initial concept was to get to meet each other, client and instructor, and to allow people to see what it was we were up to, learn a little bit about us, and experience a little bit of what we do. All to ensure that anyone signing up for ongoing training knew exactly what they were getting into—and that it was exactly what they wanted.

It was just supposed to be a taste, not a full-blown training. It was the free sample to help you decide whether or not to buy the whole cake. People were not expected to be able to do anything at the end other than make an informed decision on whether or not to sign up.

That's not how it worked out.

Standing there, looking into their eyes, giving them “just a taste”—enough to get into trouble but not enough to get back out again—felt terribly wrong. So wrong that the sessions turned into a one hour emergency crash course in violence. The goal shifted off of a free sample and found its way back to our core, founding principle: *make sure the client can get it done well enough to survive and win*. Can one hour make a difference? Well, it'll be dirty, and ugly, but if they do everything we taught them in that hour, then, yes, it can.

We wouldn't sleep well if it didn't.

### *Principles You Can Use*

As instructors, what we can do in violent conflict—our own personal skills and abilities—means absolutely nothing to you. The fact that we know how to dislocate someone's shoulder and break their neck—after throwing them through the air—doesn't make you any safer. We're not your bodyguards, we won't be there when it's time for you to act. You'll be on your own, and it will come down to what you, personally, can do.

Showing you a fancy technique that relies on physical conditioning, coordination, and years of practice is showing off. It may be impressive, and it may make the person showing it feel good, but it's not getting you any closer to surviving what could be the last day of your life. Looks great, feels good, and it's of absolutely no use to you.

At a three-day seminar in Dallas, one of our instructors showed an awesome throw involving a shoulder dislocation. It was quick, dirty, and got the job done in a single motion—tearing the shoulder out of the socket and dumping the guy on his head in one, easy step. Or so he thought. Everyone present was duly impressed and eager to get on the mats and try it... and when they did, not a single person could get it done. Now, that doesn't mean some of them weren't close, but no one was doing it well enough for a life-or-death situation. In other words, some of them might have been able to pull it off—but not good enough to bet their life on it.

In most training environments, the instructor would just tell you to keep working on it. This isn't necessarily a bad idea—as long as you have plenty of training opportunities ahead of you. These people had less than a day left. Six hours, and they'd be back on the streets, back into the rest of their lives. And they needed to be able to preserve those lives with what they could

reliably do, right now. The instructor immediately scrapped the frustrating exercise and replaced it with a simpler, more direct and achievable way to tear out a shoulder and dump the guy on his head. While there were some who were disappointed that they weren't doing the "cool" technique, everyone could get the job done well enough to absolutely wreck the other person. The instructor had ensured that when they walked out that door, everyone there could cripple a man and put him down such that he couldn't get back up. They could bet their life on what they could do.

Understanding *why* a shoulder comes out of the socket and *how* to make that happen are far more important than the thousands of different movements you could use to tear it out.

Instead of useless techniques, we give you principles you can use. Instead of an empty set of motions to mimic, we break out the principles that make those motions useful—the principle reasons why that motion causes an effect, how it achieves the goal of violence and gets you the injury you need. We get to the root, underlying rules that govern all violence and make sure you can get it done.

### *Facts, Not Opinions*

There are an awful lot of different opinions out there regarding what to do when faced with the realities of violence. Unfortunately, a lot of those opinions aren't grounded in reality—they fly in the face of common sense, basic physics and physiology, and hard-won personal experience. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and that opinion may reflect their own experience and what works for them. It's when they attempt to extrapolate that opinion outward, beyond themselves, and impose it over inconvenient physical realities that they run into trouble. And if that's the guy you're learning from, it can mean trouble for you.

Reality is awfully inconvenient. It has a way of steamrolling right over flights of fancy—something that seemed like an incredible idea at the time, logical and enthusiastic-nod-inducing, ends up flattened with all the best parts squirting out like a ruptured tube of toothpaste. It may have been a great idea, but the actual execution just doesn't hold up.

When this happens in training for violence, you're left with a choice: you can ignore reality and pretend it works, or you can swallow your ego and change what you're doing. This isn't an easy thing to do. There were lots of times when we wished it wasn't so. When a training method or a really, really cool technique turns out to be useless when compared against the physical realities of violence, it's a sad day. There are a lot of fun things we liked to do and train that ended up being just plain wrong, like practicing elaborate knife defenses. Working with the knife that way makes you feel really good—as you would expect "not getting stabbed" to do—but it doesn't jibe with video evidence of stabbings. Or police reports from victims. Most people report never seeing the knife, or even knowing they were being stabbed—they thought they were being punched—it wasn't until they saw the blood that they realized something else was going on. This makes it highly unlikely that you'd even know you needed to do a knife defense technique, let alone execute it.

That inconvenient reality brings up another issue: if you finally realize (after being stabbed repeatedly) that a knife is involved, is going for a knife defense technique going to make a difference at this point? Or is it just going to get you stabbed more?

Realities like this challenged our assumptions and forced us to make the choice: opinion, or the facts? We chose the facts. The fact of the matter is you have to do what makes the stabber successful—cause injury. That's the only thing that's going to see you through. As cool as the

knife defenses were to practice, and as comforting the idea of not getting stabbed is, none of that holds up outside of practice.

This is the process we used to winnow out the approaches that actually work from those that are just nice ideas, but wrong. We checked everything against videos of actual violence, police and coroners' reports, sports trauma medicine, and most importantly, the experiences of people who have prevailed in life-or-death situations. If it didn't match up, we chucked it, no matter how much we didn't want to.

In the end, we're left with a system that is internally and externally consistent, based on facts that you can check for yourself. Don't take our word for it—opinions have a way of going in and out of favor, but the facts remain the same. If you're going to bet your life on anything, it should be the facts.

### *We Listen and Adapt*

Most importantly, we listen to our clients: what they find useful, and what they don't. What they want and need, and what they don't want to be bothered with. At every training seminar we hand out questionnaires to find out how the participants felt about the experience; we take their responses to heart and change our training methods accordingly.

The most notable example of this was when a client noted that a small, informal session highlighting a number of different ways to access the eyes—different angles, body positions and with several different tools—made a huge amount of sense. It was what allowed them to finally “get it” in a way that the preceding “technique-based” part of the seminar had not. This forced us to confront the issue of whether to train people the way we had learned it, or to train them the way we understood the material now.

This one comment from a client changed our entire training approach—we literally tore it apart and reassembled it from the ground up. Instead of training techniques with a specific set of movements (and then hoping the clients could pull them apart to find the base elements), we trained targets exclusively, showing, for example, how to injure the eye from various orientations—on the ground, on all fours, standing, and so on. The results amazed everyone, instructors and clients alike—what once took three days to instill we could now do in one day. And then, with a little more effort, half a day. Returning clients, those who had trained with us before the methodology shift, were astounded at how good the new people were in such a short time.

To this day we pay close attention to what our clients have to say about their experience and progress—we never know when someone will point out the next big improvement in our methods.

Our goal is to give you the best training possible—you're the reason we're here and your success is all we're really interested in. Injury Dynamics is the perfect intersection of the actual facts of violence presented by people who know the subject cold and really just want you to get it right. That's what motivates us—knowing that after you walk out that door you're a little bit smarter, a little bit harder, and a lotta bit better at using the tool of violence. Your success is your survival, and having you make it back home alive is why we're here.

## Epilogue

Since I asked you to think about it, let me tell you about the two things that changed my mind about training for violence. The first one was a newspaper article; the other one was more immediate, personal, and changed my life forever.

Like anyone who pays attention to the news, I had grown jaded, able to scan down whole columns of murder, mayhem, and general inhumanity without so much as a raised eyebrow. But one day, in one of those two-inch stories buried in the back of the paper I saw something that gave me pause: COLLEGE STUDENT USED UP IN VOODOO RITUAL, it read. It was one of those “What the hell?!” moments where you’re not sure you’re reading a bad pulp novel or the plot to a one-star slasher movie. A local college student went missing while drinking with friends across the border in Mexico. A few weeks later he turned up flayed and exsanguinated on a voodoo altar somewhere deep in Central America. What hit me in that moment wasn’t so much what had happened to him (as horrible and devastating as it surely was for him and his family), but the fact that there were people in this world who would do such a thing. People living in the same world I do, that we all do, breathing the same air, drinking the same water, looking at the same moon. The world got wider in that moment, deeper, darker. No matter how moral, kind, and accommodating I was, I still shared the world with those people. In that moment I realized how it might make sense to know how to kill someone with my bare hands.

The second incident was losing a loved one to violence. My best friend of 10 years was shot to death by a car thief in his own front yard. He had done nothing to invite this upon himself; he lived a life that was nearly guaranteed to avoid such a fate. It was completely random and the results shattered more than one life—his fiancée was there to watch him die. There are still good friends I haven’t spoken to since because of the way it altered the flow of our lives. Not a day goes by that I don’t miss him.

This is why I train. Not to be a badass, or act like I’m harder than everybody else, or be intimidating, or stroke my ego. I train because we sane, social folk think we live in a world ruled by good intentions. But we live in a fantasy bubble. The truth is, we share this world with monsters.

This is why I train—and why I will train anyone who’s willing to learn.

*Thanks for reading.*

*For more information visit us at*

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