

COMBAT MINDSET

By: Tom Perroni

My motivation for this article came from two true warriors. I had the distinct honor and pleasure to have lunch with Lt Col Dave Grossman & Frank Borelli - two of the best warrior trainers in the business

After lunch Frank and I took some training from Lt Col Grossman. Now let me preface this by saying I have read all of Lt Col Grossman's books, as well as the ones he has written a foreword to such as Training at the Speed of Life and American Thinking just to name a few. I have also read just about everything Frank Borelli has written. I consider Frank a friend and we have had many discussions on this topic (as well as many other topics).

Before the class started Lt Col Grossman informed Frank and I that he would be teaching this class a little differently in preparation for the New York Tactical Officers' Association seminar in Poughkeepsie, New York. So as any good Instructor I am a good student first and I listened with great interest for this new knowledge that would be imparted.

However what he said was not "NEW" but reemphasized in a way that made me think. Here is what he said:

"Denial kills you twice. It kills you *once*, at your moment of truth when you are not physically prepared: You didn't bring your gun; you didn't train. Your only defense was wishful thinking. Hope is not a strategy. Denial kills you a *second* time because even if you do physically survive, you are psychologically shattered by fear, helplessness, horror and shame at your moment of truth."

As he said this I looked around the room at the people in this class: a police chief, a SWAT cop from West Virginia, a police officer from Maryland, several FBI agents, and a major from FPS. Surely these warriors are trained, they are physically prepared, and they have made the decision to be a Sheepdog and not Sheep. But I thought for a moment about some of the civilians I train for a Concealed Handgun Permit in Virginia. How many take only the four hour Firearm Safety Course that is required to get the Permit? How many make the commitment to take further training of any sort? There is a big difference between Target Shooting and Combat Shooting. Please remember that paper targets do not shoot back.

I tell my students that before they carry a handgun with that new Concealed Carry permit they must ask themselves a very important question...

At the moment of truth when you are placed in a situation where you must defend your life or the lives of others you had the right to protect could you? After being trained correctly use that handgun to defend yourself or others you had the right to protect by shooting to stop the threat and quite possibly taking someone else's life to save your own life, could you?

If you can not answer this question or the answer is **NO** then do not carry a firearm because if you hesitate you're dead; if you have it and don't or can't use it, it may be used against you.

I also tell my students that just merely having the Handgun is a false sense of security. You must be trained in how to use your Handgun. But you also need to be trained in the "combat mindset" You must realize that nearly **80%** of all shootings happen in low or reduced light. How much low light training have you had? We are also trained that the average contact distance between perps and officers or civilian concealed carry permit holders is less than **3 feet**. How often do you practice your Draw and CQB weapon retention? We are trained that the average number of rounds fired in a gun fight at that distance by police is **10 rounds**. We are also trained that the hit rate of those rounds fired is about **20%** or to put it another way an **80%** miss rate. That means that 2 in 10 rounds hit the intended target. Do they suddenly lose the marksmanship skills they have developed over years? The answer is NO.

Lou Ann Hamblin a veteran Police Officer explains it like this "...many elite athletes fail during competition because of a lack of mental control. One of the major psychological characteristics of Olympic Champions is their ability to cope with and control anxiety. In reality, athletes do not lose their physical ability, technical skills, and strategic knowledge during a competition. Rather, they lose control of cognitive factors such as the ability to concentrate, to focus on relevant cues, to engage in positive self talk and so forth."

We call this the "Choke" Phenomenon. An example of this can be an Officer involved shooting: the officer fires the subject does not immediately go down (Like in the movies and on TV); the officer believes they have missed the target so they pull the trigger again. The subject will not go down (miss again). Now they begin to shoot faster and the officer's shooting gets worse and worse. The negative self-talk that often occurs when we begin making critical judgments about what a terrible shot we are will only serve to increase the toxic cocktail coursing through our veins. In actual gunfights people have been known to shut down, quitting before the fight is over and resigning themselves to lose.

On the other hand, many successful professionals use positive self-talk and imagery, letting insignificant errors pass right through their minds while focusing

on what they must do to win.....seeing and hearing themselves as successful. Positive self talk can also come in the form of auditory recall. There have been reports of officers in life threatening situations "hearing" their Firearms Instructor say...."Shoot back ...finish the fight...your **NOT** dead dammit!!!"

As Sir Winston Churchill said:

"Never give in! Never give in! Never, never, never, give in except to convictions of honor and good sense."

What is mindset? For the fighter, mindset is the conscious or subconscious willingness to commit harm (lethal or non-lethal) against another. When engaging in combat, mindset, more often than not, will be the determining factor as to your success or failure, regardless of technical proficiency. Anybody can train in a martial skill, but few have the mind and will to use their skills for killing or serious injury. Mindset's partner is "mental trigger," and this trigger is the defining moment that forces you to engage your opponent with the goal of injury or death.

So how do you train in Mindset? Here is how we begin the Mindset portion of our training. Keeping in mind that Mindset is just one of the 3 main principals taught at Perroni's Tactical Training Academy. Mindset, Skills Training and Tactics. Here is how we teach Mindset:

Since 9/11 everyone is familiar with the "Color Code" used by the government (Dept. of Homeland Security) to indicate the terrorist threat level. However I was taught that the originator of the "Color Code" was Jeff Cooper. Upon it's inception it had absolutely nothing to do with tactical situations or alertness levels. It had everything to do with the state of mind of the sheepdog. As it was taught to me by an instructor who got it straight from Mr. Cooper, it relates to the degree of danger you are willing to do something about and which allows you move from one level of mindset to another to enable you to properly handle any given situation as it progresses. In this 'Color Code" we have 4 colors that represent 4 mental states. The colors are White, Yellow, Orange, Red. I have listed them with a definition of each:

White - Relaxed, unaware, and unprepared. If attacked in this state the only thing that may save you is the inadequacy and ineptitude of your attacker. When confronted by something nasty your reaction will probably be, "Oh my God! This can't be happening to me." (Sheep)

Yellow - Relaxed alertness. No specific threat situation. Your mindset is that "today could be the day I may have to defend myself." There is no specific threat but you are aware that the world is an unfriendly place and that you are prepared to do something if necessary. You use your eyes and ears, and your carriage says "I am alert." You don't have to be armed in this state but if you are armed

you must be in yellow. When confronted by something nasty your reaction will probably be, "I thought this might happen some day." You can live in this state indefinitely.

Orange - Specific alert. Something not quite right has gotten your attention and you shift your primary focus to that thing. Something is "wrong" with a person or object. Something may happen. Your mindset is that "I may have to shoot *that* person." Your pistol is usually holstered in this state. You can maintain this state for several hours with ease, or a day or so with effort.

Red - Fight trigger. This is your mental trigger. "If that person does "x" I will shoot them." Your pistol may, but not necessarily, be in your hand.

It is further simplified by Mr. Cooper in this way:

"In **White** you are unprepared and unready to take lethal action. If you are attacked in White you will probably die unless your adversary is totally inept.(Sheep)

In **Yellow** you bring yourself to the understanding that your life may be in danger and that you may have to do something about it.

In **Orange** you have determined upon a specific adversary and are prepared to take action which may result in his death, but you are not in a lethal mode.

In **Red** you are in a lethal mode and will shoot if circumstances warrant."

At Perroni's Tactical Training Academy I train my students to Be Sheepdogs among Wolves and Sheep. We as Sheepdogs must defend ourselves and families as well as the Sheep from Wolves. So my students are trained to be in condition yellow at all waking hours of any given day and are trained as well as prepared to go to Orange or Red on a moments notice. However as the situation deescalates our students can deescalate just as quickly as they can escalate through the color code.

Proper Training is also important. I am a big proponent of Force on Force Training. You will never know how you will react in a given situation until you are put in that situation. As LtCol. Grossman says it's the "Fight or Flight Reflex". What would you do if someone was say 8 yards away with knife with no obstacles between you threatening you with that knife? How fast can someone cover that distance?.....What if they were say 21 feet away. How fast could they cover that distance? If I told you 1.5 seconds would you believe me? If they had a Baseball Bat in their hand would that make a difference as to how fast they could cover that distance? Sure would. Mindset-Training-Tactics are the keys to your survival. Would you stand and fight or would you run?

If I had to summarize Combat Mindset it would sound something like this: A Sheepdog who had the Training & Mental Awareness and used the proper Tactics to handle any encounter, swiftly, accurately, morally and finally. They would be the one walking away from the confrontation. Either because it was the correct thing to do or because they were the victor in the encounter. "Conflict is inevitable; Combat is an option".

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