



eJournal

of the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, LLC

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Controlling Fear

by Tom Givens

When a responsible person first begins going armed, he is usually haunted by two recurring questions, or self-doubts:

1. If I'm really attacked, and my life is at stake, will I be able to handle it?
2. What if I screw up and kill an innocent person?

This is a normal reaction, and to a degree it is healthy. We do, however, need to address these issues and resolve them, before a conflict, so that they will not raise their ugly heads when we should be concentrating on winning the fight. Remember, if an unavoidable fight is thrust upon us, we **MUST WIN!** The alternative can be death, or crippling injury.

The first issue to face is that of FEAR. Fear is a normal reaction to physical violence for most people. In addition, since most of us no longer have military experience and live in "civilized" surroundings, we may not have ever actually engaged in a true fight before our moment of truth in a criminal attack. This fear of the unknown is, for many, worse than the fear of being hurt or killed.

First, let me say this. Unless you are an exceptional person, a nutcase, or a liar, and you have actually been involved in armed conflict, you have tasted fear. I'm not ashamed to say I have been scared several times, and I fully expect to be scared again before my life is over.

What you must learn to do is control your fear, and do what you must to win.

Fear can be controlled and overcome, even in life threatening circumstances. This is obviously true, and it is proven every day by hundreds of ordinary people all over the country.

Here are some steps you can take to make this process easier:

1. Admit to yourself you are afraid, then move on. Concentrate your mental energies on the task at hand, not on your fear of death, injury, or loss of ego.
2. Avoid dwelling on the chance of failure. Concentrate on finding a way to win.
3. Take control of yourself. Autogenic breathing is the very best and most efficient way to do this. (Details later.)
4. Focus on getting the job done.
5. Have a Plan B. Always, always, always, expect Plan A to fail. Expect your gun to malfunction. Expect the suspect to stay up after being hit solidly. Expect to be injured. If any of these things occur, have a pre-planned option to continue (Plan B).
6. Turn anger into a motivator. Who does this clown think he is!?! What makes him think he has the right to (rob/rape/kill/ pick one) me?!?
7. Accept an element of fate in every situation. You

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can get hurt by accident after doing everything right. Control everything you CAN control (selection of equipment, getting adequate training and practice, being alert, thinking tactically) so there are fewer things you CAN NOT control.

Courage under fire is not a matter of being without fear. It is a matter of being able to control fear and accomplish your mission, which is to stay alive. Only fools are fearless.

The other nagging self-doubt concerns over-reacting and shooting someone under unjustifiable circumstances. If you are reading this, that will not happen. Citizens who are responsible enough to obtain carry permits, seek expensive training, make time for practice sessions, etc. are simply too honest, caring, and self disciplined to shoot people without just cause. In my own state, there have been eight fatal shootings by permit holders in the past three years. Every single one was judged to be justifiable and lawful by the Attorney General's office.

Not one of these permit holders was charged with any crime nor were they sued for anything.

Why? Because every single case was clear-cut, obvious, and morally, legally, and ethically justified. Private citizens have a great reluctance to shoot, even when it is necessary. In fact, for many the problem they will face is the exact opposite of being "trigger happy." Believe it or not, every day, people who are armed and know how to use their weapons, and who have an opportunity to use their weapons to save their lives, fail to do so and die as a result.

This happens to both private citizens and police officers alike.

You ask, "Why on earth would someone who is armed stand there and literally watch a thug kill him?" There are a number of reasons, and they stem from the socialization process that the normal person goes through from birth (but that the criminal does not). These reasons most often include:

1. Moral repugnance to taking a life: You have been

taught all of your life that human life is sacred, that to kill is wrong, and that only bad people hurt others.

2. Failure to be mentally prepared:

An astonishing number of people who go armed have never given any thought whatsoever to the fact that they may have to shoot someone. To many, the gun is a talisman, and wearing it is thought to ward off evil spirits. In fact, it is a tool, one used for launching bullets, and nothing more.

3. Failure to understand the dynamics of armed confrontations: Many people armed with firearms are killed by thugs armed with edged weapons because they fail to take the "lesser" weapon seriously; they don't understand that deadly force is deadly force, whether applied by gun or knife; and they don't realize how quickly someone at ten feet can be at their throat.

4. Inhibition by community pressure and fear of lawsuits: These are trivial matters compared to being killed, raped, or permanently crippled. Get your priorities straight! Unless you are alive, these don't

matter, anyway.

5. Uncertainty about when deadly force is justified: This is a training issue. Be certain that you understand the laws of your state as they apply to self defense and the use of deadly force. Once you have internalized this information, it is simple and easy to see when the circumstances fit the law. There is nothing subtle about someone actually trying to kill you! It will be obvious to you, to any witnesses, and to the police.

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The best way to be fully mentally prepared to actually press that trigger if you have to, is to develop a well thought out and plainly stated set of rules of engagement, long before you are faced with a crisis. This is referred to as a "pre-made decision," thought out, verbalized, and firmly planted in your mind in advance.

I suggest the rules of engagement set out by fellow trainer Gabriel Suarez, a decorated veteran of several police gunfights and a world-class firearms instructor. Gabe uses the acronym IDOL, which stands for "Immediate Defense of Life." Make a commitment that you will only fire as a desperate measure to terminate a threat to your own life, or the life of an innocent third party. If you pose an imminent and otherwise unavoidable threat to my life, or that of an associate (wife, partner, etc.). I will act swiftly and decisively to put you down and out. I will reach for my gun for no other reason, period.

Many people think about this incorrectly. They ask themselves, "If he does ----, can I shoot him?" That is a recipe for disaster! Your question should ALWAYS be, "Do I have to shoot him?" Ask yourself, "If I don't shoot this man, right here, right now, will I be killed or crippled?"

If the answer is yes, shoot him! If the answer is no, try something else.

As with most things, this is a matter of training. Proper training ingrains the proper responses.

Repetition is the mother of all skill. With skill comes confidence. With confidence comes the ability to think under pressure and make sound tactical decisions.

To be of value to you, training must meet the test of the Three R's. Training must be: RELEVANT/ REALISTIC/ RECENT.

Relevant training refers to exercises and skill drills pertinent to the task of self-defense.

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Realistic training is conducted on humanoid targets, from the holster, with a carry type gun and full powered ammunition, in varied lighting conditions, and under time pressure.

Recent training assures retention of motor skills, which degrade quickly. The skills involved in rapidly firing a full-power weapon with precision are perishable, and are lost completely without frequent practice. I suggest two sessions of dry practice at home each week, with at least one range session per month to maintain competency. Practice builds skill, skill builds confidence. Having a well developed skill set, and the confidence that well developed skill engenders, can help you keep your head and stay in control during highly stressful conflicts.

"An amateur practices until he gets it right. A professional practices until he can't get it wrong."

About the author:

Tom Givens is the owner and operator of Memphis' predominant indoor gun range, Rangemaster. For over thirty years Tom's duties have included firearms instruction, training police, military and foreign government agents. At Rangemaster, he directs a successful training business that takes people from the ground-floor basics of gun safety to high-level tactical training.

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Autogenic Breathing to Counteract Fear and Stress

by Gila Hayes

Few factors cut into performance like breathing disruption! Getting oxygen into the system is an immediate and on going requirement and few things in life disrupt breathing as regularly as stress, fear or even performance anxiety.

Situations that increase adrenaline levels limit us in many ways. Vision is affected, fine and complex motor skills diminish, and disruptions to creative thinking or reason are all common symptoms.

The cure? Autogenic breathing. From yogis to Lamaze practitioners, to SWAT cops and infantry soldiers, altering and controlling the rhythm of the in breath and exhalation is a proven path to controlling mental and physical reactions that stand between us and our goal (be that survival, improved performance under stress, temper control, you name it), as well as giving mastery over the psychological damage suffered by survivors of life-threatening events. And autogenics is nothing new; psychologists and counselors have used it combined with the power of suggestion, and with progressive muscle relaxation therapy for decades.

In our community, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman has done much to introduce the value of autogenic breathing, and his efforts have spread into the counseling community where it is taught both for performance enhancement as well as used in therapeutic processes to relieve post-traumatic stress troubles. He gives a great explanation of the physical process and why it works at http://www.killology.com/art_onkilling_anxiety.htm and since he has so generously shared his work on the Internet, I strongly recommend you take time to study what he has written.

Some have renamed the technique tactical breathing, combat breathing or square breathing, because of the four-count employed. One slowly draws in breath on a count of one-two-three-four, holds in that breath for the same counting sequence, releases the breath slowly for the four-count, and then pauses, delaying the next inhalation for the same one-two-three-four count. As the in-hold-out-hold sequence is slowly repeated, heart rate moderates, blood pressure decreases, anxiety diminishes, and in the mind, the capacity to reason and solve problems creatively returns.

Fortunately, few of our Network members face life-threatening situations on a regular basis! Thus, we encounter the challenge of remembering to use techniques like autogenic breathing to control the physiological and emotional arousal a true adrenaline dump creates. Experts like Alexis Artwohl, Grossman and Charles Hume, Jr. all recommend practices to make implementing autogenic breathing a *conditioned* response during an emergency.

Simply learning how to do autogenic breathing isn't enough, because of adrenaline's disruption of higher brain function in the throes of fight or flight response. Go to <http://www.pursuitwatch.org/stories/adrenaline.htm> and read Charles Humes, Jr.'s article on the influence of and solution to adrenaline during an emergency. Pay special attention to the latter part of the article, then look for ways to adapt and implement his recommendation to practice the skill by associating it with a triggering event.

What triggers can our members use to make using autogenic breathing a conditioned response? Take classes that include simulated force-on-force training blocks, and quietly add autogenic breathing to your execution of the drills. Use mental imaging – in your mind's eye, put yourself in a self-defense situation, and implement autogenic breathing. Use it while driving when risky road conditions have you white-knuckling the steering wheel. Use it to calm down when faced with a task that induces anxiety. Simply put, make square breathing part of your regular coping mechanism.

Learn about and practice autogenic breathing. Even a superficial web search turns up the following resources for further study:

http://www.killology.com/art_onkilling_anxiety.htm
<http://www.burrese.com/2008/03/autogenic-breathing.html>
<http://www.policeone.com/training/articles/1271860>
<http://www.guidetopsychology.com/autogen.htm>
http://www.holisticonline.com/stress/stress_autogenic-training.htm

Letters to the Editor

We want to hear from you! Please send your letters with questions and comments to editor@armedcitizensnetwork.org.

Be sure to include your full name, town and state of residence. Though it will not be published, we also require an E-mail address that won't end up in your Spam folder, or a daytime telephone number for verification of your letter prior to publication.

Letters may be edited for brevity or clarity.