

# TECHNICAL NOTE

Self-defense is not an emotional reaction. It is a conditioned and measured response to a threat.

## Reading Our Environment Part I

### Atmospherics

by Don Adams

Many times, an attack is sudden and without warning. We call it an ambush. That's the way nature has groomed the predator to behave in the wild. The predator spots the prey way before they are aware of their presence. The resulting action of the prey to escape is often too little too late. It's no different in the human world.

If only the prey had been more aware sooner, they might not have ended up as food for the predator. The earlier we become aware of a potential predator's presence the greater our chances of avoiding the predator.

Today, threats are everywhere. It's more than just telling someone to be aware. Awareness is a skill set that can be developed not just a random observation of someone else's obvious behavior. We are safer when we understand and follow the methodology of awareness and thus the avoidance of conflict.

We start with the sense of the larger area and then drill down into the behavioral detail of an individual. We start at the top and work our way down to the finer details. We call the overall collective mood of the environment, the Atmospherics.

### The Atmospherics

Atmospherics is the sense we have about an environment. It's an intuitive assessment we make based on the overall big picture. When we enter an area, we immediately get a sense of how we feel about it.

We have two levels of awareness. One level is our ocular consciousness. We are aware of what we see, but there is a second level that operates in the background. It's our awareness on a subconscious level.

We might be unaware of that level, but we feel it when our subconscious picks up on something that wasn't expected or expected but not present. It's called "that gut feeling." Just because we get it doesn't always mean something's wrong but if we get it address it until you find out.

**Positive Atmospherics** is the comfortable collective sense of *security* that we have as we enter a new area. **Negative Atmospherics** is the collective sense of a *threat* we might have.

Whether the sense is positive or negative, it is derived from the movements, emotions, behaviors, sounds and condition of the area and the people present...consciously and subconsciously.

How many times have we arrived at a destination and it just doesn't feel right. If we are in an unfamiliar environment, it's not the secure feeling that will notice, it's the hesitation we will feel to immediately embrace the new area.

There are some characteristics about the environment that will feed into our collective senses. Things like the level of the noise, the activity level or the perception of order or disorder of that environment

The noise level of an area is something to notice. What kind of loud is it? Is it a positive loud where people are having a good time. Are they happy and energetic? Or is it a negative loud due to angry shouting or arguing? Is it a confrontational or hostile

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loud? And conversely what is the quality of the quiet? Is it a positive quiet that is born out of calmness and not out of fear or anxiety...or a forced quiet out of fear or submissiveness...or an uncomfortable quiet.

What is the activity level like? Does it have a high or low level of activity? How does the activity level fit with the baseline we have established? Is it a crowding activity that can signal a transition to negative atmospheric?

What is the order/disorder ratio? Signs of order are where everything looks maintained. It's where the rule of law is generally obeyed. Are people acting in a calm manner or are they chaotic. Signs of disorder include a area lacking maintenance, people not showing respect for other people or property. Or a noticeable lack of security? If there is a greater sense of order than disorder, then the ratio would be greater than 1 and if the sense of disorder is greater than the sense of order, the ratio is less than one. But the ratio isn't a quantifiable number it's a judgment – a sense of how things are – an estimated for positivity or negativity of an environment that you sense.

As we examine the area take note that there are two types of areas: habitual and anchor points. Habitual areas are the areas that are open to everyone, where there is no effort to screen or control the entry into these areas. These are places like foot courts, public parks, downtown areas, malls, etc. Anchor points limit their access to qualified individuals. Places like movie theaters, private events, sports events, music concerts where access is limited and secured by a ticket or familiar recognition.

Iconography plays a big part in our collective assessment. Iconography is the display of signs and symbols that identify an area or send a message about that area. Generally positive iconography will go unnoticed or have any meaningful implication with respect to whether an area is safe or not. Negative iconography is what we pay attention to. It may send us away or help us choose another route. In those cases, we are proxemically pushed away from those areas. Negative iconography are belief messages or gang affiliation messages showing who is welcome and who is not.