

What Are You Being Taught and why?

By Troy Coe

Martial artist throughout history has discovered countless ways to wage war. Developing ideas for attacking and defending through experience or even amassing entire methods of fighting by studying animals. Whatever process they chose there must have been a reason **“why”** they decided to do it that way. That reason was influenced by a variety factor, but the driving motivation was probably the belief that it would work or work better than another way. Most within the martial arts community when demonstrating a technique will promote it from an **“If This, Then That.”** standpoint. What this means if they have reasoned that whatever it is that they are attempting to do will be useful if their opponent does a specific thing (**If This**), they can do a particular something (**Then That**). This will repeat until completed.

There is nothing wrong with this approach but what can happen is becoming infatuated on a single response to one thing. However, for it to work the **{insert technique here}** must be executed in a particular way and at a specific speed. When attempting to develop **“new”** techniques, tactics and strategies or new ways to use existing ones I highly recommend that you put those to the test using the following criteria. I believe you will find that if there are any failures due to the following criteria, it will be difficult to promote that skill set to your students with a clear conscience.

Principles for what is taught:

These “principles” serve as an initial test to determine the likelihood of the concept, technique, tactic or strategy in question would actually “work.” With experience, you can implement small tweaks to these, and they could become a viable skill set to develop. Sometimes you may need to walk away from a particular idea for a while and coming back to it later.

Below is a list of attributes that I attempted to use while aggregating Reality Defense Training. I have been following this principle as diligently as possible since 1993.

1. Margin for Error

“We assume that under stress you will shorten or lengthen everything +/- 50%. We also assume that under stress you will do what you are trained to do” ~ T. Coe

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What this means is when you are faced with real, potentially deadly violence you will very likely NOT do (*whatever it is you are trying to do*) right. Or right enough to trust your life to it. The more complicated something is, the less likely you will be able to utilize it under stress. Generally, with fine motor skill requiring techniques or tactics the less forgiving they are. If you are **not** supposed to load something, we assume you **will** load it, if you are **supposed** to load something we expect you will **not** load it enough.

Side Note: Just because you load something that you should not have loaded does not mean that it will not work. However, loading it (*depending on how much you load it*) could render the technique much less useful due to the telegraphic nature of loaded strikes. This could allow an opponent to defend or avoid the attack. (*I am referring to the difference between an Economy strike which should not load and a power-oriented strike which should be loaded*). **This** serves to impact the “Survival Concept” negatively.

Conversely, if you do not load it enough will it still hit at least as hard or a little harder than a standard Economy strike? Generally, the answer would be yes so there may not be a problem with this deviation. This equation could quickly change with another technique.

I have had students ask me referring to the above quote. “You say we assume that under stress you will shorten or lengthen everything +/- 50%, but we also assume that under stress you will do what you are trained to do”.

Which is it?

My answer is: **Yes...**

I usually let that sink in for a few seconds; then I explain that the idea behind training is to get so proficient at your skill set that under stress you will know no other way to execute whatever technique or tactic any other way except the correct way. This idea re-enforces the need for perfect practicing. ***A young lady many years ago told me that “practice does not make perfect, practice makes permanent. Perfect practice makes (perfectly) permanent”.*** The quality of the practice is more important than the quantity.

I will be posting videos demonstrating visual examples of **Margin for Error**; please look for them at survivethefight.org.

2. Pre-existing Response

As people navigate their way through life, they will become accustomed physically acting or reacting to various stimuli. These reactions are not a single stimuli reactions. If a person tosses a ball to you during a conversation in mid-sentence, you will catch or attempt to catch that ball. This will be done with virtually no conscious thought on your part. This is called “Pre-existing Response.” The idea behind this principle is when developing a method of teaching with a goal of developing reproducible skill sets in a short time frame, it is better to use “**Pre-existing responses**” whenever possible.

It is not unreasonable to think a person that is being threatened by an attacker to raise their hands placing them between them and their attacker. Using this idea to formulate the reasons “**why**” you would endorse standing one way over another or one hand position over another. Something feeling strange is not necessarily the same as something feeling uncomfortable. For example, we teach primarily fighting with our strong side forward. The reasons are explained and demonstrated in the first session that new students attend. It is very common for them to state that it feels weird. However, it takes only a few sessions for it to feel completely natural. This approach is used in many areas of Reality Defense Training as it allows students to increase skills quickly because they do not have to unlearn something they very likely already have some idea how to do.

I will be posting videos demonstrating visual examples of **Pre-existing Response**; please look for them at survivethefight.org.

3. Common Delivery

This principle states that “***It is better to do as many of the same things, for as many things as possible, so that you do not have to figure it out under stress.***” The idea behind this is self-defining but to elaborate on this briefly; I will refer to a handgun pointed at the face. What I have witnessed in some styles of martial arts although their responses to this vary greatly, they will do something different if the attacker is left-handed or right-handed. I believe it is folly if you think you will have the intestinal fortitude to calmly determine which hand the assailant's weapon is in and which of the several responses I have in my arsenal to use. It is better to have a technique or response that will work equally as well regardless of which hand is used. The previous example is a straightforward and obvious one, but there are a plethora of techniques and tactics that will work in a large variety of the same situations.

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The Idea is to determine how few techniques and tactics can work well in the most situation. This will help keep your mind clear. Adrenal stress has a history of causing overwhelming reactions due to having too many options at your disposal, and there are too many to make a choice.

I will be posting videos demonstrating visual examples of **Common Delivery**; please look for them at survivethefight.org.

Requirements for proper instruction:

While working to assemble the approach (**the “why”**) to the techniques, tactics, and strategies of Reality Defense Training’s programs I determined early on that a method that looks like it will work may not work. What are the criteria for establishing these checks and balances? It is crucial that you adhere to these following principles if you are developing programs to teach. Understand that what you are showing may be used in a life-threatening situation. It had better work as promised (if executed as intended). There are many factors but limiting liability should be considered in your decision of what to teach and use.

Note: It is entirely possible to do everything correctly and still fail. Sometimes people are better, or their techniques and tactics are superior. Also, fortune and misfortune to apply here. This is why thoroughly researching a potential school is essential. Also, be leery of schools that want you to sign a long-term contract early on. You may find that that school is not a good fit for you. If you chose to begin training, I highly recommend that you always keep the following three questions in mind.

Additionally, I find it amusing when watching a martial arts instructor teach ***{insert techniques here}*** and everybody is in awe at the results of the demonstration. Like mass hypnotism, viewers accept what is being demonstrated or taught as absolute truth because they see it with their own eyes. The spectators will begin daydreaming and visualize themselves performing that technique in real life and never once question if it would work, and if so **“why”** or if not **“why”**?

1. Will it work with adrenal stress?

I believe this question is overlooked or purposefully ignored the most. The entire Martial Arts industry, whether you are dealing with combat sports, self-defense, competitive shooting or tactical shooting (*firearms training is a martial skill*) is heavily ego driven. As stated in [Understanding Fear and Violence](#) paper I say:

“Fear is one of the most experienced and denied emotions known to mankind. Every living creature experiences fear to varying degrees when faced with violence when there is the perception that injury or death may occur. But humans are different, humans will both experience fear of injury and death but will also experience fear of losing face in front of their peers or even complete strangers.”

I believe this is where the problem resides. Humility is virtually nonexistent in today's society let alone the martial arts community (which is where it belongs). These frail egos cause people to think, speak and act foolishly (from a position of fear). When faced with a challenge to their physical prowess in any area there are those would beat, shoot or stab you to death to prove they are right or better. This is why I believe a person will learn to handle a firearm or walk into an M.M.A. gym.

Adrenal Stress (*fear*), is disregarded rather than understood and learned to control and use. This has devastating effects on the application of ANY physical endeavor. Whenever a physical activity would be required, whether it be a competitive sporting endeavor or a self-defense situation there will be some measure of adrenal stress (*fear*). Failure to accept that will manifest into poor performance or fear ranging from being embarrassed in front of a crowd to death. If adrenal stress can affect you so dramatically, you must allow yourself to embrace that fear.

“Fear never changes, but the trained ones know how to use it to their advantage” ~ T. Coe

2. Will it work in real combat time?

It is prudent to start slowly and controlled when learning new physical techniques. It is essential to make sure every movement is happening in the proper sequence (*developing coordination*). Moving too fast too soon will lead to the poor execution of techniques. Sometimes drills require conscious control to feel what your body is doing. Some martial art approaches only practice exclusively moving slow (Tai Chi, Systema). Just moving slowly in training will stifle the ability to react to full speed actions indeed.

Many martial artists will demonstrate techniques and never move at any respectable speed. The lack of speed and momentum is lost on the participant as well as the spectator if they are unaware of the requirements of that technique to be successful. This is common in the Filipino knife and stick fighting arts. The way they deploy these weapons the tactics they promote will not work in “**Real Combat Time.**”

3. Will it work against a non-compliant opponent?

The most deceiving element of martial art effectiveness is the “compliant/non-compliant opponent.” The bad guys are attacking with at perfectly thrown strike at the perfect range and intensity to allow the defender to dispatch the attacker effortlessly. If only there were a world-famous instructor present to quickly and easily dispatch his attacker with seemingly superhuman feats of timing and brutality. All while failing to recognize the presumed bad guy standing in place and or falling to the ground right on cue. I believe this is the single most damaging element in the Martial Arts instruction today. Instructors are teaching from an “If this, Then That” approach filling students with a false sense of ability and security.

During a real-life assault, your attacker will be attempting to cause you harm and inhibit your ability to inflict damage on them. If during you’re training, you are always winning and not having to work for the success you are NOT learning how to defend yourself. Real self-defense should not be presented as a skill set that requires zero effort to attain. Any instructor that allows their students to develop and hold false confidence in their ability is doing a substantial disservice to those students. The disappointing part about this is many of those instructors are suffering from the same affliction.

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