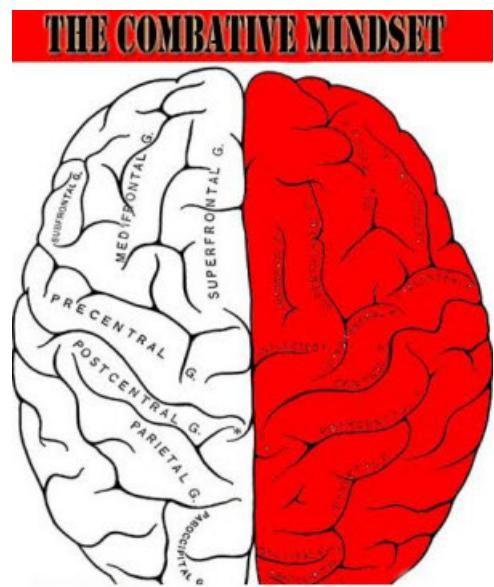


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The Combative Mindset

By Chris Fry

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Understanding the mind-body connection is critical to effective self protection.

I live a defensive lifestyle. My primary lines of defense are software or mental skills such as awareness, avoidance and escape, plus physical boundary setting and verbal diffusion. This defensive mindset is the foundation of my training and preparation. Sadly, I often find myself not utilizing these soft skills due to the minutiae of daily life that occupy my thoughts: family and job obligations, sickness, schedules, finances ... the list goes on. These common daily distractions occur far more often than being attacked, and so I sometimes allow my soft skills and defenses to drop unintentionally.

Similar to paying for car insurance, I train in personal protection so that if my soft skills fail and I am involved in a critical life-threatening incident, I have coverage. Unfortunately, like car accidents, we don't always get to choose when that incident may happen. Because of the proximity or distance associated with robbery, rape, kidnapping, assault and the tactics criminals utilize to enact such offenses, we will most often be reacting to a criminal's action against us. If this happens, my defensive skills have failed or been circumvented, and I need to regain control of the situation immediately or risk losing more than my possessions.

The Four Fs – Freeze, Flight, Fight, Freeze

It is well known that like other animals, humans experience instinctive reactions to terrifying situations: Freeze, Flight, Fight and then another Freeze (which is often simply giving up). These instinctual reactions can happen and pass in microseconds or last several minutes, depending on the individual, their mindset, training and ability to process information. Freezing is often a result of shock, the feeling that "this can't be happening to me," or an attempt to gain more information about what's happening.

This stage can be dangerous because being trapped or lingering in the Freeze stage can have terrible results if the threat turns out to be real and a critical incident is indeed happening. Flight is always advised when available, but it isn't always, which leads us to the Fight stage. The Fight stage is where mental conditioning peaks and a split-second decision must be made. When the attack is already underway, you have to catch up from that initial shock, and if you realize that Flight is not an option, the Fight stage becomes critical to winning and surviving.

The final F -- a second Freeze -- is often a result of being overwhelmed, stuck in the initial Freeze, lack of opportunity for Flight, or inability to catch up or mount an effective response to the critical incident. The goal of any personal protection training should be to make sure this final Freeze never happens.



Mindset should be the foundation of all training and preparation.

Combative Software

Regaining control or retaking initiative while being assaulted (the third F, Fight) is extremely difficult. I need to have in place a mindset that addresses this situation -- a combative, winning mindset. If awareness has broken down and I am under attack, the time for acting defensively has passed. If the situation dictates that I go for a handgun, edged tool, impact tool or utilize empty-hand skills, then I need to do so without hesitation or fear. My goal must be singularly focused upon winning the fight as rapidly as possible.

Unfortunately, most of us are not born and raised with a combative mindset. We are raised to be good people wanting the best for ourselves, our family and others. An admirable mindset and life goals, however somewhat unrealistic for the world we now live in. A combative mindset

must be cultivated, developed and trained. It requires an understanding of interpersonal conflict and knowledge of ourselves, how our bodies will react to stress (the four Fs), what we are capable of, and how far we are willing to go.

Develop a Combative Mindset

Similar to how it is impossible to acquire new hard skills (the ability to shoot, cut, punch or kick effectively) in the middle of a fight, it will be very difficult to develop a combative mindset during a life-threatening incident. Like hard skills (which the vast majority of personal protection training focuses on), combative software needs to be developed and trained effectively and consistently.

To develop an effective combative mindset, you first need to realize and admit to these facts:

- 1) Extreme violence **CAN** happen to me and my family anywhere, anytime.
- 2) The police and/or help won't **ALWAYS** be there for me.
- 3) My home, neighborhood and city are **NOT** immune to crime and violence, no matter how safe they may appear.

Consider the above and ask:

If necessary to protect myself or my family, am I willing and able to take another human being's life with whatever means are available to me, e.g., gun, knife, rock, pen, fingers, teeth?

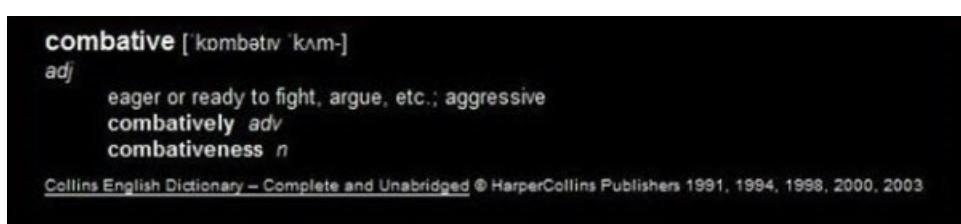
Does my faith or belief system allow me to harm another and possibly take a life?

Do I have the willpower to persevere and continue fighting when fatigued or injured, perhaps mortally?

Can I continue fighting in the face of extreme mental stress, such as seeing a loved one, child, partner or friend wounded or killed?

Do I have the willpower to do the things my mind tells me I can't?

Consider these facts and questions. Think about them carefully. Most won't be able to answer all of the questions and some people may still deny the three stated facts. And if you think you know the answers, you probably don't, unless you have already experienced conflict and had to fight, persevere and win.



Understand the difference between thinking/training defensively and combatively.

Tips for developing a combative mindset:

Admit to and accept the (3) facts stated above.

Explore your faith and/or belief system. Study, understand and accept the mental and physiological effects that extreme stress will have on you.

When injured, get angry. Develop vehemence as an emotional reaction to pain.

Test your willpower every day -- do something you don't want to do. You won't want to fight another person, but you may have to.

Acclimate yourself to this reality.

Get into better physical condition. A healthy body supports a strong mind, handles fatigue better, and recovers from injury faster.

Visualize and rehearse conflict. Realistic visualization and rehearsal simulate experience within the subconscious mind. Experience builds confidence, and confidence supports success.

Train, train and train some more. The better trained you are, the more confident you will be in your ability to protect yourself and/or others.

These are just a few methods you can use to begin developing your combative mindset. Don't neglect your defensive software, always attempt to maintain environmental awareness, avoid task fixation and avoid trouble. While living a defensive lifestyle, understand and acknowledge that possessing a combative mindset will better prepare you for all eventualities. Live defensively but fight combatively.

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Excellent article. Makes you aware of things you may not have considered before.

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As a good police officer friend once told me, "You must be professional and polite at all times and have a plan to kill everyone you come into contact with" - That is reality.

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