

## Defensive Strategies



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Most people reading this magazine know quite a bit about firearms. If you are a beginner, you are probably focused—properly—on a specific gun, with safety first (Is this gun loaded? Where is a safe direction for the muzzle? I'm going to shoot—how steady are the sights, and how much pressure do I need on the trigger?)

A little more advanced, and you still might be thinking mostly of equipment-related things. (Do I want to buy a revolver or a semi-auto? Can I manipulate the controls on that gun? What caliber should I get?)

With more experience come thoughts about protection. (How can I carry this gun? What should I do if someone is in my home? What will I do if this happens or that happens? Will I hit my target if I have to shoot?)

There are four concepts hidden in those questions, concerns and things we acquire along our gun-related paths: equipment, skill, tactics, and mental awareness. I'm going to ask you to prioritize them in your own mind. Consider

## Priorities for Survival

them right now. What is the most important for you to have if you are going to survive any of the life-threatening situations you might encounter? What is the next most important? The least important?

Let's talk about each of them in turn, and see if that makes you change your priorities.

**Equipment.** This includes your gun, your ammunition and your method of carry. It seems that most discussions among gun people center on equipment. Endless discussions.

Is the optimal defense gun a 9mm semi-auto or a .40? Is a revolver sub-optimal because of its limited capacity? Should I get a full size or a compact? Which is better, an in-the-pants holster or one that is outside? What about a gun purse? What are the pros and cons of a leather holster vs a Kydex one? Is special, expensive defense ammunition necessary, and if so, what brand, what bullet and what load is best?

Knives and pepper spray are non-gun equipment that can contribute to your safety, but which have their own endless discussions of type, brand, size and so on.

Many folks go through several guns and carry methods, trying to find the best, or at least the best for them.

**Skill.** This is what you can do with the equipment you have. For most of us, skill with a gun is developed by going to a range and shooting. We measure our skill, roughly, in how many rounds we can get on various parts of a target at various distances. Speed is another skill that can be developed.

Drawing from a holster or other method of concealed carry is an additional skill that some get to practice and others cannot.

Shooting games like IPSC and IDPA develop skills like safe gun handling, drawing, holstering, reloading, moving with a loaded gun, shooting at multiple targets, and more.

Learning to fight physically, without any weapon, is a wonderful skill to develop. Learning to utilize improvised weapons is another useful skill to have.

Weapon retention and disarming are other skills that training is available for.

**Tactics.** A tactic is an action or strategy designed to accomplish a specific end. In personal defense, the end you want to achieve is getting through a bad situation alive. Tactics include things like learning how to search a room to see if anyone is there without being seen yourself.

Couples can develop tactics such as a code word or phrase that would mean nothing to a bystander but that means to each other: "I'm aware of potentially serious danger that I can't explain right now, but we are getting out of here INSTANTLY to a safe place where we will be safe and I can explain."

A common action is to take the "tactical seat" in a restaurant. That's a seat where nobody can come up behind you, where you can see at least one entrance (in case of trouble coming in) and have spotted at least one way out (which you will use if trouble comes in).

Creating a safe room in your home, a place to go where you can lock the door, access a gun, call the police and stay safe until they arrive is an excellent tactic to prepare for a home invader, an ordinary robber or a stalker.

Practicing what to do if an active shooter event erupts is something groups of people usually do together (tactics for law enforcement + hospital personnel, or law enforcement + school personnel), but individuals can work on this, too.

**Mental preparation and awareness.** This is planning to use your tactics, skills and equipment. It is things like deciding, in advance, if I'm ever alone in an active shooter situation, I'll call 911 first, then consider whether I might be able to stop the shooter; if I'm not alone, I'll tell the other person to call 911 instead of doing it myself.

Mental preparation is thinking about, say, observing what seems a robbery in progress. Are you going to intervene, or call 911, observe, and wait as long as possible before intervening?

Mental preparation is planning, if you are ever in a carjacking situation, that you will let them take the car, provided nobody else is in the car, rather than try to stop them with your gun.

Mental preparation is deciding, in advance, that you will let someone go, if at all possible. You will let them go rather than try to hold them for the police.

Awareness is just what it usually means: being cognizant of who and what is around you at all times. Paying attention to anything or anyone who might become a threat.

Awareness is often the thing that buys you enough time to realize that something bad is happening, and to react, in accordance with your preparation, tactics, skills

and equipment, in time to keep you and yours safe.

Do you want to revise the priority of these four important areas differently than you did at the beginning of this article? I'm about to reveal the priority that was taught to me years ago by one of the finest teachers, and which has served me and many other extremely well.

Because gun people spend most of their time and money at stores, on line, and pages in gun magazines, dealing with equipment, you might think that equipment leads the list, but actually it comes last.

Mental awareness and preparation are by far the most important things to have, and they are the least expensive to acquire and can be practiced every day.

Tactics comes next on the list. Knowing what to do in a wide

variety of situations will serve you well. Skill is next. Equipment last.

Think about it. If you are always aware and have mentally and physically rehearsed many different scenarios for trouble, but armed with a "mouse gun," you will probably see trouble coming in time to avoid it; if you do have to shoot, you will know you have to empty that gun with the best-placed shots you can. If you have the "best" gun-holster-ammo combination ever developed, but no awareness and you have never thought deeply about how to handle a confrontation, you probably won't see trouble coming, won't avoid it, and won't handle it very well.

So stop obsessing about whether you have the best equipment or not. Spend your time learning the things that will matter in a crisis.

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