



7 STEPS TO HIGHLY EFFECTIVE

# SITUATIONAL AWARENESS





# COOPER COLOR CODES

## *BE ALERT*

The idea of color codes to describe a person's level of situational awareness was developed by the late Col. Jeff Cooper, considered by many to be the father of modern defensive pistol techniques. Long before it became fashionable, Col. Cooper was teaching people how to avoid confrontations and how to win the confrontations they could not avoid.

**WHITE** – You are completely oblivious to your surroundings.

**YELLOW** – You are alert and engaged with your environment.

**ORANGE** – You have identified something that may be a threat, but you are not in any immediate danger.

**RED** – You have identified a threat and are now forced to react to it.



# 1

## **GOLDEN RULE**

*DON'T GO ANYWHERE WITH YOUR GUN YOU WOULDN'T GO WITHOUT YOUR GUN*

Being a responsibly armed American means being just that: responsible. Carrying a gun does not make you a superhero, and it does not make you a vigilante. It makes you an individual who is better prepared to deal with a deadly force encounter when you have no other option than to defend yourself or your loved ones. If you know the area and know places you should avoid, avoid them. The hair on the back of your neck never lies. If you feel like you might be in danger, you probably are. Yes, you might have every right to travel anywhere you wish, but when doing so could put you in danger, the best course of action is to avoid dangerous areas altogether. If you are forced into a dangerous area because of your job or some other real and important reason, then you need to be extra vigilant. Don't go looking for trouble. Never start thinking that just because you have a gun, you will be safe.



## **2** DITCH THE TECH

*STAY OFF THE PHONE*

Activities like wearing earbuds or headphones, sending or reading texts, and talking on the phone show that you're not paying attention to anything else around you and therefore make you a prime target for predators. Don't live in Condition White. (See an explanation of the Cooper Color Codes two pages earlier.) Always be monitoring your surroundings and make sure you see what is moving into and out of your personal space. Pay attention to new areas you're entering and keep an eye out for identifiers of violence, such as gang graffiti or packs of

young men. Remember to SEE these things and make note of them. Don't just look at or past them — really see them and think about what they mean. You need to see potential risks in order to avoid them, and you can't do that while your nose is buried in your smartphone. As difficult as it might be to pull yourself away from your emails, texts, podcasts and news feeds, your safety depends on it.



### **3** **STAY ALERT** *NOTICE WHO NOTICES YOU*

Violent predators look for an easy meal. After they see a potential mark, they will likely stalk that mark in order to size up the situation and see if they can move in to strike without being noticed. (See Item 2 above.) The best way to ensure you are not the victim of a sudden assault is to make sure you notice who is noticing you. Has someone taken more than a passing interest in you? Does that person appear to be following you? If you change directions, does he or she follow? Do you feel like this person is paying too much attention to you?

You can keep from looking like a victim by doing the following: Walk firmly and with purpose, ensuring that everyone around you understands you are engaged in your surroundings, and make enough eye contact with those who pass to assert that you are paying attention without making so much eye contact as to appear aggressive. If you look like prey, you could be preyed upon. If you take away the element of surprise by noticing who notices you, a predator will likely move on to another target.



## 4

### **PARK IN WELL-LIT AREAS**

*PREDATORS SEEK  
DARKNESS*

Many times, the victim of a violent attack meets his or her attacker halfway. Whenever possible, avoid parking in dark or secluded areas. Predators prefer to operate in the dark, so you must deny them this advantage. If you are forced to park in a dark or secluded area, this is where your flashlight comes in. Walk with your flashlight in your weak hand, sweeping where you're walking with the light's beam. This will communicate to anyone who can see you that you're not an easy target. Don't be afraid to shine your light into any dark corner or potential hiding space. If a person approaches you, shine your light directly in that person's face. Doing so will give you a tactical advantage and an opportunity to assess the situation. When you're forced to park in a secluded area, back into your parking space. This will make a quick exit easier. Plus, many criminals associate a vehicle backed into a parking spot with law enforcement and will likely want nothing to do with you.



# 5

## **AVOID DANGEROUS AREAS**

*DON'T TAKE SHORTCUTS*

Shortcuts have a nasty tendency to be dark, secluded and off the beaten path. Predators are opportunistic by nature: What they're counting on is that victims will present themselves as targets by making themselves vulnerable to attack. Like always parking in well-lit areas, making sure you do everything you can to avoid dark and isolated places will do more to prevent an attack than almost anything else. Always remember that the most effective way to deal with violence is to avoid it. You might be in a hurry, but don't think it's reasonable to save time by putting yourself at risk. Remember: It CAN happen to you. There is no need to invite an attack by heading into an area that might be occupied by an attacker.



## **6** USE WHAT YOU HAVE

*PAY ATTENTION*

Learn to look at your surroundings like a detective: Take everything in and understand its potential. That isn't just a window; it's a way to see into and out of a building or a vehicle, it's a way to get into and out of a building or vehicle, it's a mirror, and it's a source of very small, very sharp pieces of glass. This might sound strange, but once you make the decision to carry concealed, you're entering into a world of extreme consequences and will have to operate accordingly. Everything counts now.

You need to make note of every exit, every window, every table and every chair. You need to notice wheth-

er vehicles in your area are occupied or empty, whether they're running or not. Could the people inside those vehicles help you or hurt you? Does being higher up on a hill allow you to see farther? Could you use a parked car or a park bench as an obstacle — thus slowing an attack — by keeping it between a potential adversary and you? Being in tune with your surroundings and exactly what is happening in your area is of the utmost importance, as is your ability to use those environmental factors to your advantage. Escape routes, sources of cover and potential dangers are all parts of your environment.





# 7

## DITCH THE VERBAL CHALLENGE?

*THIS IS NOT RENAISSANCE FRANCE, AND YOU ARE NOT IN A DUEL OF HONOR; REMEMBER THAT* **BY C.R. WILLIAMS**

**Imagine:** You're in a store in a mall with friends and you hear gunshots. "Active shooter" is probably the first thing that comes to mind. You produce your gun and are looking for someone who looks like he or she needs shooting when the gunshots stop. You don't holster your gun yet, but you do tuck it under the jacket you're wearing. Then a man with a rifle walks into sight. (Just to be clear, you are sure that he is not a good guy.)

In your imagination, what do you do?

**Do you:**

- Get your gun out and up and shoot him?
- Get behind the nearest thing resembling cover (assuming something is there) as you bring the gun out and up and shoot him?
  - Make an evasive movement to throw the gunman's aim off as you bring the gun out and up and shoot him?
  - Make an evasive movement by way of getting the heck out of Dodge?
  - Say to the man with the rifle, "Young man, I think you need to put your weapon down"?

Brendan "Dan" McKown chose the last option on Nov. 20, 2005, at the Tacoma Mall in Washington State. He was shot five times and left paralyzed.

**Imagine now:** You're at the front counter of a Burger King about to order. A young man comes through the door and walks right up to the other register with his gun up and pointed at the clerk and demands money. You're beside him, just a few feet away, and his attention is focused on the woman behind the counter and the area of the register in front of him.

**Do you:**

- Draw your gun and shoot him?
- Wait for him to complete his robbery so you can get your lunch?

- Not move but rather observe and get all the details you can so you can make the best possible report to police?

- Run out of the store?
- Draw your gun and tell him to stop or you'll shoot him?

A Florida man chose the last option a few years ago. He exchanged gunfire with the robber, who was wounded as well, and spent considerable time in the hospital recovering from his injuries.

**One more now:** You're in the back corner of a convenience store, closing the cooler door after selecting a cold drink. As you turn to head for the counter, a man comes through the door, points a pistol at the clerks behind the registers and starts screaming for them to give him the money or he will shoot them. You do your due diligence, look around quickly and don't see accomplices. No one else is near enough to the robber to worry about.

**Do you:**

- Wait for him to finish the robbery and pay for your drink with a debit card because the store no longer has cash for change?
  - Hide and hope the robber doesn't see you?
  - Get to cover or concealment, draw your gun quietly and get aim on the robber in case he sees you and comes after you? (Don't forget to put the drink down.)
  - Get to cover or concealment, draw your gun quietly, get on the sights and command the robber to put down his weapon or you will shoot him?
  - Get to cover or concealment, draw your gun, get on the sights and shoot the robber in the back of the head to prevent him from killing the clerk and maybe you too?

The last one is a hypothetical that gets bandied about in gun forums from time to time, but it is a plausible hypothetical that raises the central question of this discussion: If you have the advantage of superior position,

surprise or both, should you issue a challenge to the attacker before you shoot?

Before you answer that question, make sure you can answer this one: Are you able, as you are now, to make a precise shot, without warm-up or other preparation, supported, rested or unsupported, within seconds of perceived need? Do you have the skill and the will to shoot someone who is not facing you? Will you be able to “see-setup-shoot” on demand and without hesitation?

The skills you need include:

- Solid competency with sighted shooting
- Knowledge of and ability to assume supported shooting positions quickly on demand
- Ability to recognize and employ field-expedient rests for shooting
- Knowledge of the “light switch” (the “no-reflex” point in the head) and the ability to hit it from wherever you are
- Solid understanding of your limits where “light switch” shots are concerned

A lot of people already have or can acquire those skill sets. That's not an issue. What might be an issue with some is the idea of shooting someone without warning from behind or from the side. When would that be a) a valid and possibly best option and b) as legally defensible as possible?

Here's an acronym to help you decide: IDOL.

IDOL stands for Immediate Defense of Life. It's a standard that can be used to judge almost any shoot/no shoot decision you need to make. To make use of the IDOL standard, ask and answer this question: In my best judgment, if I do not shoot right now, is someone going to die?

That's IDOL in a nutshell.

Make sure you understand that the law does not demand absolute and complete certainty of circumstance before you make a trigger-pull decision. The “reasonable person” standard still applies here. Would a reasonable person, seeing the same thing you are seeing, think that you or another is about to be killed, especially given all that is known thanks to the plethora of reporting and news sources available to everyone about crimes such as mass shootings and armed robberies?

Also remember that there will be two justifications necessary for you to shoot in defense of another: justification in your mind at the moment that shooting is necessary and justification in the eyes of the law afterward. You must be able to articulate to investigators why you felt it was necessary to shoot anyone, much less some-

one (let's be honest here) from ambush. Normally, if you can justify the trigger pull itself, you should be able to properly explain the shooting afterward. Just be aware that you will have to do that so you won't be surprised when you do. And don't forget to have your attorney present when you make your detailed statement to investigators.

Now you have the skill. Do you have the will? Can you bring yourself to smoothly and evenly pull that trigger and shoot someone who is not immediately attacking you and who is not even aware of your presence, even with sufficient justification?

Some of you will not be able to. Not yet, at least. Why is that?

Maybe you're reluctant to be the cause of death of another human being. (I suspect this is why some gun-bearers favor the pelvic shot as a default response.) In situations like I write of here, with guns coming on to line or already on-line, stopping the shooter before he or she murders will require massive, immediate and probably fatal damage or a no-reflex shot that will be fatal. Some people, even those who carry concealed, can't deal with that.

Some of you have yet to give up on the concept of offering a “fair fight” (whatever you think that is) to someone who wouldn't think of giving you one for the merest instant. Or you think it worth the risk to your life and the lives of others to offer mercy (demanding surrender) to someone who would never offer it to anyone else. Or you think to offer a chance at life to someone who has committed himself or herself – and others – to death, such as an active shooter or a jihadist.

If you think you harbor some of these doubts and want help resetting your priorities, ask yourself what you would rather have when the shooting stops:

- Innocent men and women – even children – dead and dying
- Yourself dead or dying, your last sight being that of others being killed because you didn't take the action you could have
- The attacker (probably) dead or dying without knowing you were there but also without killing you or anyone else

The third option, I believe, is the choice. What is yours?

Think. Consider. Decide. Prepare. Be ready. As best and as much as you can, do it now. Don't wait until the sights are on before you know what you can and will do.

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