

WINNING FIGHTS

12 Proven Principles for Winning
on the Street, in the Ring, at Life



DR. PHILLIP STEPHENS

Techniques change; principles are timeless

"A clear and strongly worded fighting manual in the long tradition of Sun Tzu."
—Kirkus Reviews

"*Winning Fights* will stand as a modern classic on management of human conflict in multiple dimensions."

—Massad Ayoob, director, Massad Ayoob Group, LLC; author

"Dr. Phillip Stephens has penned an amazing book covering the strategic implications of martial arts."

—Stephen K. Hayes, Black Belt Hall of Fame; author

"Erudite, insightful, resonant . . . goes to the heart of what it takes to win any fight."

—Alberto Mella, MBA; speaking and personal communication coach; martial artist

"*Winning Fights* is Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* meets Miyamoto Musashi's *The Book of Five Rings*."

—Craig D. Reid, PhD; martial artist; author, journalist, and martial arts cinema expert

"Extremely well-researched book on the strategies and tactics of prevailing in a violent situation."

—David Kahn, US chief instructor, Israeli Krav Maga Association; author

Winning Fights focuses on 2,500 years of proven fighting principles originating from Eastern concepts and proceeding to the modern era. This book is for pugilists seeking an edge in competition as well as soldiers and law enforcement officers facing conflict. Like *The Art of War* and *The Book of Five Rings*, however, many of its lessons also apply to the world of business and negotiation.

Dr. Stephens looked beyond the technical to the conceptual and found that winning fights requires twelve core principles: preparation, awareness, commitment, lethality, efficiency, discipline, power, focus, fierceness, surprise, timing, and fortitude.

This book features

- Twelve principles for winning fights
- A survey of Eastern and Western traditions
- An intelligent yet accessible discussion of these concepts

With this book you will

- Learn to see beyond fighting tactics, which change, to fighting principles, which endure
- See your training in powerful new ways

"*Winning Fights* is based on principles, not techniques,"

Dr. Stephens writes. "Technique is important, but techniques change, adapt, and evolve. Principles are timeless."



Dr. Phillip M. Stephens is a black belt in Ketsugo Do jujutsu and has won championship titles in self-defense tournament competition. He is a commissioner appointed to the North Carolina Boxing Commission, which regulates combat sports, including mixed martial arts and boxing. He practices emergency medicine as a physician assistant and holds a doctorate in health science. Dr. Phillip Stephens lives in Fairmont, North Carolina.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ix

INTRODUCTION

xi

SECTION 1: TWELVE PRINCIPLES

xix

PRINCIPLE ONE

PREPARATION

1

PRINCIPLE TWO

AWARENESS

21

PRINCIPLE THREE

COMMITMENT

41

PRINCIPLE FOUR

LETHALITY

53

PRINCIPLE FIVE

EFFICIENCY

67

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRINCIPLE SIX
DISCIPLINE
77

PRINCIPLE SEVEN
POWER
87

PRINCIPLE EIGHT
FOCUS
103

PRINCIPLE NINE
FIERCENESS
115

PRINCIPLE TEN
SURPRISE
133

PRINCIPLE ELEVEN
TIMING
143

PRINCIPLE TWELVE
FORTITUDE
153

STRIKING THOUGHTS
163

SECTION 2: PARTING PRINCIPLES
171

FIGHTING WITH TACTICS
173

FIGHTING WITH HONOR
191

FIGHTING WITH WEAPONS
205

FIGHTING WITH WORDS
219

INDEX
237

FOREWORD

by Massad Ayoob

WHEN I MET Dr. Phillip Stephens, it wasn't in the dojo or on the range or in the classroom. It was in the emergency department of a hospital where I was the horizontal patient, with a leg swollen to twice its normal size and a potentially life-threatening blood clot therein. One of the nurses told me reassuringly, "Don't worry, you're getting Dr. Stephens. He's the best there is. He's famous."

The nurse nailed it.

When I walked out of the hospital that night on my own two feet, I knew that I had indeed been treated by a master medical professional. Only later would I know how much else Dr. Stephens had mastered in his highly accomplished life.

By turns a champion fighter in competition and a vastly experienced instructor of others in dojo, ring, and cage, and one of the top medical professionals in his specialty and a role model for others in the same discipline, you are about to find out that Stephens is also a master communicator.

In *Winning Fights*, Dr. Stephens draws from philosophers and kings, from generals and heroic "grunts," from fistfighters and swordfighters and gunfighters, from statecraft and religion and more to clearly delineate universal truths of human conflict.

FOREWORD

Deeply researched and up-to-date physiology and psychology figure in Stephens's insightful advice. Certain truths of human conflict are universal, and are equally applicable on the street, on the battlefield, and in wars of words, whether they take place in the courtroom or Debate Society, in a dark alley with no witnesses or on a podium before a vast audience.

Dr. Stephens has fought in the ring against powerful men capable of killing him with a single blow. He has fought disease and trauma countless times, with the trusting patient's life and limb on the line. He has spent his life studying the history and the mind-set of others like himself who fought against sometimes overwhelming odds, in righteous cause. He has prevailed in those endeavors so many times that his thoughts on such things absolutely compel attention.

Human conflict is a vast and multidimensional topic, each subdivision of which can be a life study in and of itself. Phillip Stephens has the education, the experience, and a lifetime of broad-based research to tie those elements together into basic truths that serve across the wide spectrum of arenas in which they take place, often so suddenly that only someone who is prepared for them beforehand will be able to cope, and win.

He understands that a healer of men facing a fast-breaking medical crisis, a General Patton facing Field Marshal Rommel's dreaded Afrika Korps, a petite woman in a dark alley facing a hulking rapist, or a debater in righteous cause squaring off against a silver-tongued devil will all need the same resolve, preparedness, determination, and wherewithal to bring the conflict to a just conclusion.

And, most important, he shares the tools, the formulae, that have been proven to prevail in such circumstances.

Perhaps the greatest value in *Winning Fights* is that it applies to a wide range of stages upon which conflict takes place. In four-and-a-half decades of working within the justice system and teaching people how to win fights, I've learned that you can be wearing a hat that says "Defensive Tactics Coach," "Shooting Coach," or even the currently popular "Life Coach" and find yourself recommending the exact same strategies and tactics. It's about principle, not technique.

It has been an honor to write this foreword for Dr. Stephens's book, and I hope you benefit from his wisdom as much as I have.

INTRODUCTION

Winning fights is based on principles—not techniques.

TECHNIQUE IS IMPORTANT. But techniques change, adapt, and evolve. Principles are timeless. Bruce Lee recognized this truth, and advised to “absorb what is useful, discard what is useless and add what is specifically your own.”¹ To Lee, there was no single superior style of fighting. He even referred to his methods as the “style of no style.”

All fighters face the same challenges. Whether just two people fighting in a ring for sport or two armies engaged in geopolitical conflict, a fight is a fight.

Eastern and Western military strategists throughout millennia have agreed on the principles that overcome the challenges faced during a fight, whether between individuals or nations. The basic principles for winning fights simply do not change and are like laws of nature ignored at one’s peril. But the knowledge is often lost in the noise of literature or the static of techniques, tactics, and form. The average fighter then loses sight of these foundational principles, which are required to win and must be applied before any other strategy.

Winning fights, surviving conflict, and successfully engaging in combat rely on these principles. Specialized skill and technique are important, but it is foundational principles that win any fight regardless of scale or

INTRODUCTION

context. Basic principles are essentially laws that govern the success of survival from personal to global conflicts.

These same principles have many parallels and applications in life and business affairs. If these principles are understood and a warrior code is adhered to on a daily basis, the success of winning fights will spill over into successful peaceful routine activities as well. Societies would be more polite and fewer fights would be fought. Why is it important for a peaceful person to understand these principles? A classic Eastern saying is that, "It is better to be a warrior in a garden, than a gardener in a war."²

Peace and violence are not mutually exclusive concepts. All warriors want peace. In fact, warriors who have seen violence especially want peace. But history has demonstrated that peace can be elusive. Preparing for conflict is the best way to ensure peace.

Knowing how to win a fight isn't in opposition to peace or love. It is a part of peace and love. If you want peace then you must be willing to fight for it. You must be willing to defend the people you love. Warriors pray for peace but are willing to stand against evil in the world. Violent men with discipline are the only ones who stand between the world and evil.

This book is not about style. It is about concepts that are necessary for winning and are perilous to ignore, as evidenced by thousands of years of trial and error. It is the culmination of the work of the greatest martial strategists in history.

Martial artists have argued for centuries about which fighting style has the most effective techniques. Lee was the first modern-day martial artist to emphasize principle over technique, as principles of winning are timeless and are not confined by style. Winning is embodied by philosophy and strategy. This is why a work on principle rather than simply technique is important.

More than two thousand years ago (c. 5th century BCE), Chinese General Sun Tzu wrote one of the oldest known works concerning foundational principles for winning fights. *The Art of War* presented a time-tested philosophy for winning wars, managing conflict, and leading organizations.³ There are other ancient military texts similar to Sun Tzu's work, including *The Book of Five Rings*, by Miyamoto Musashi, *Hagakure*, by Yamamoto Tsunetomo, and *On War*,⁴ by Carl Van Clausewitz. Sun Tzu's

work is the most prominent and earliest example, but all of these compositions echo similar principles, as truth is truth evidenced by similar themes for winning. Time, technology, and even context have had little impact on these principles, which have been echoed countless times in works spanning two thousand years.

Many of these early texts formed the foundation for modern military theory and have survived the test of time and conflict. They devote chapters to broad aspects of warfare and focus on principle, strategy, philosophy, and mind-set. So even these early texts on warfare agree on the foundational principles of winning fights regardless of the techniques or tools employed to win those fights.

Several years after the death of Bruce Lee, who popularized martial arts in the West, Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper, a former Marine who served in World War II and the Korean War, founded the American Pistol Institute (later called Gunsite Academy).⁵ While Bruce Lee was best known for his development of unarmed approaches to winning fights, Cooper taught the pragmatic use of firearms. Most shooting fundamentals can be traced back to the work of Cooper, who many consider to be the creator of modern-day handgun shooting techniques.

But like Bruce Lee, Cooper recognized the importance of principle over technique. He felt that neither weapons nor martial art skills were the most important means of surviving a lethal confrontation. To Cooper, the primary tool was mind-set.⁶ He articulated these basic principles often in his shooting lessons, just as Bruce Lee and Sun Tzu had done. These modern fighters reconfirmed that fighting principles were consistent and timeless.

On November 12, 1993, the first Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) aired from the McNichols Sports Arena in Denver, Colorado.⁷ During those early fights there were no weight classes or judges. There also were only two rules: no biting and no eye gouging. Matches ended by submission, knockout, or one of the fighters' corners throwing in the towel. Gloves were permitted but mostly for the protection of the fighters' hands, not the other way around.

Royce Gracie won UFC 1, UFC 2, and UFC 4. He fought to a draw in UFC 5. Gracie popularized Brazilian jujutsu and almost always conquered

INTRODUCTION

much larger opponents.⁸ The Gracie brand of jujutsu had a significant impact on the UFC, which continued to grow and was soon followed by other successful organizations, such as Bellator. The principles of how a smaller fighter could successfully defeat a much larger opponent are at the heart of the Gracie system, which descended from ancient Japanese warriors. It was put on full display during these fights and subsequently changed Western thinking about how fights are won.

To pardon the pun, fighters are still grappling today with what will be successful in winning fights in a competition involving few rules. The ground fighting techniques of Gracie are now well known and practiced by many. The principles that successful fighters apply to their craft set them apart. Certainly, Gracie's techniques helped him to win fights, but the principles and mind-set that he employed were equally important. A fighter can't expect to enter a contest against a much larger opponent armed with technique alone.

These principles work on any scale and transcend fighting, and I believe they are now more important than ever. My father served in the U.S. Strategic Air Command during the Korean War. Their mission was one of deterrence, and its success is evidenced by the fact that we avoided nuclear war. It was a classic Sun Tzu strategy of subduing an enemy without fighting; a show of force can result in peace. Few appreciate the success of U.S. strength during the Cold War and the strategies that kept us safe. It's tough to appreciate avoiding a fight through strength because there is nothing to measure except the lack of a fight.

Let's face it, humans are a violent species. What's worse is that many enemies are not deterred by the possibility of a nuclear exchange and actually may have an apocalyptic mission. Some strategists think it is better to simply fight and win than to employ deterrence strategies against an enemy that has nothing to lose. Totally winning a fight is more important than ever in a world where nothing will deter the enemy. Winning is the only option.

Every fighter must understand the fundamental principles that are required for winning a fight if a fight is inevitable. These principles are universal and apply whether the conflict is on the battlefield or in a dark alley. Quite simply, they are the principles of war and apply to the modern-day warrior armed with the latest technology just as they did to a Samurai

armed with a sword. A fight is still a personal thing. Its sting hasn't dulled over time and the edge of the warriors' weapons is still intact. If anything, weapons have become sharper.

THE 12 PRINCIPLES

Readers may well ask, why just 12 principles? Well, there are numerous principles found in historical and modern texts, many of which overlap or are emphasized differently. Initially, I tried to encapsulate the history of fighting into 10 principles to make it simpler.

I have studied and taught martial arts and have won a couple of world tournament titles in the self-defense division, along with a bunch of smaller ones. I even help write the rules on fighting as a member of the Boxing Commission.

I also have a doctorate in Health Science (DHSc) and approach the study of the ancient texts from an academic point of view as someone who teaches evidence-based solutions and critical thought. Someone with this experience should be able to fit the concepts into a concise framework to make them easier to study, comprehend, and apply.

In my research, I polled some combat personnel with whom I worked and others stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, home to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. This put things into perspective. The experiences of these heroes dwarfed my fighting knowledge. My study of fighting was scholarly and my practice was in controlled environments. These guys live or die by the warrior spirit and view the principles from a different perspective.

Nothing compares to talking to a guy about fighting who has been shot at many times. These modern-day warriors enriched my knowledge of fighting. My academic approach and martial arts experience were enhanced by my interactions with these heroes, whose lives depend on the proper application of these principles. I found that training was good and academic knowledge was necessary, but writing about fighting isn't complete without the added perspective of someone who has repeatedly applied them to survive.

My work with the SFOs led to the addition of two principles: timing and fortitude. "Timing" was first suggested by a U.S. Marine and

INTRODUCTION

“fortitude” was seen as being of paramount importance by many in the field. Specifically, members of the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) provided feedback. With multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan over many branches of service, these silent warriors provided invaluable insight that was practical and revealed the true heart of the fighting spirit. Their input complemented the academic approach to the material. These chapters on timing and fortitude amplify the basic principles explored in the first 10 chapters.

The last four chapters explore how tactics, weapons, honor, and words factor into fighting. These sections grew from my research. Tactics are examples of practical application of the principles. Weapons are an essential extension of a fighter. Honor is especially important, as it was vital to the success of ancient societies. Words have long been the first weapon drawn in conflict. My analysis of fighting with words was another addition that emerged from those interviews. These last four sections are intended to add value to the main principles.

The 12 principles that provide the framework for this book sometimes overlap. There are also crucial secondary principles within each principle. However, the 12 items encapsulate the theme of what it takes to win a fight.

Technology may change. Techniques may change. What man fights about may change. But the principles that win fights remain the same, as does the heart of a warrior, which is required to apply these principles.

These 12 principles were forged by history and have been researched with academic rigor and continually practiced by warriors throughout the ages.

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PRINCIPLE ONE

PREPARATION

PREPARATION HAS BEEN one of the primary principles for winning fights since the beginning of recorded time. It is a universal principle that applies to everything from individual encounters to wars. The concept is self-evident. It has survived the test of time and is a good place to start.

From a tactical standpoint, the first principle should be surprise. However, the element of surprise is often afforded to the attacker and is primarily a function of offensive action. We will discuss how to introduce surprise defensively a bit later. But preparation helps counter surprise, so again, it's a good place to start.

In general, average citizens simply react to an aggressor, and thus relinquish the element of surprise. But preparation helps minimize any surprises that might benefit an opponent. The first principle is simply to be prepared for conflict. This principle is historically important.

Over two thousand years ago, Chinese General Sun Tzu foresaw who would win or lose a battle based on the extent of each general's preparation.¹ More recently, former president Ronald Reagan noted this truth in quoting George Washington, who said that to be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace.²

This concept reaches biblical proportions. King Solomon relates in Christian scripture: "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty" (Proverbs 22:3). In the New

WINNING FIGHTS

Living Translation, taking “refuge” is to “take precautions” or, in other words, to be prepared. This ancient wisdom from Sun Tzu to King Solomon is clearly applicable to modern-day warriors. Preparation is vital and involves more than physical preparation.

Former Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) heavyweight champion Randy Couture once said that a fight is 90 percent mental and only 10 percent physical. Yet most fighters train 90 percent physical and 10 percent mental.³

Ronda Rousey is a more recent mixed martial arts competitor and judo Olympian. Her preparation made her the most dominant male or female athlete in sports. Rousey recalled a story of breaking her toe during training when she was a teenager. Rather than pampering Rousey, her mother, a judo champion in her own right, made her run laps. Her mother later told her that the reason she pushed Rousey to continue despite a broken toe was to demonstrate to her that she could do it. Rousey developed a “never quit” attitude, and this preparation established her foundation as a champion.⁴

Rousey embodied this principle, especially in early fights. Her preparation was always structured and meticulous. She embodied other principles as well, which combined to make a champion. But while her preparation seemed principled in UFC 207 against Amanda Nunes,⁵ the result is a cautionary tale of how no principle stands alone.

Rousey, who is an expert grappler, was up against a boxer and lost early in the match during moments when blows were being exchanged. Now no one expects every fighter to be indomitable in every fight or to demonstrate perfect examples of every principle in every moment over the course of a career. We also don’t know what every fighter had planned or was thinking. A million plans can go wrong between preparation and execution. Sometimes a brief moment of miscalculation or an instant of opportunity is all it takes to win or lose a fight. Nevertheless, history will record that Rousey was ultimately a winner who paved the way for women in the world of fighting arts and was one of the most competitive athletes of all time.

As head basketball coach for the University of South Carolina, Frank Martin was being interviewed after winning some important games.

PRINCIPLE ONE: PREPARATION

Martin was a tough coach and explained his philosophy to the reporter, “We’ve gotten to the place in society to where we think that we’re supposed to make things easy for kids and then when they fail as men, we blame them.”⁶ He went on to explain that he demands his players work hard because success is not an easy thing. Martin believes kids haven’t changed. Adults have changed, and demand less of kids instead of preparing them for what life is truly about.

Preparation involves both mental and physical elements, with mental preparation being the most important. It can be a tough thing. But it is the foremost concern in preparing for any fight whether the encounter is for sport, self-defense, or war.

How you prepare will be determined by a myriad of factors. Size, gender, where someone lives, training, access or familiarity with weapons all determine how someone physically responds to violence and where to start in preparing for such encounters. If the preparation is training for a sport, the answer is much easier as the environment in these encounters is fairly controlled and the subsequent actions are predictable. Therefore, you have an awareness of exactly how to prepare, as all the variables are known in advance of the conflict. Sports have boundaries and rules.

How you prepare depends on who the enemy is and where the battle will be waged. In the fourth century BCE, Sun Tzu referred to knowing the enemy as a vital strategy in warfare.⁷ Regardless of whether the fight is organized sport or a fight for life, knowing yourself and the opponent is essential preparation. Ask Rousey or any successful fighter who always prepares well, but in retrospect may have prepared differently for fights they lost.

In a confined sports arena with rules, these elements are controlled and the enemy is clearly known. But outside a controlled environment confrontations are less predictable. This simply means that in preparing for sport, self-defense, or war, the only difference is the degree of predictability and control over the encounter.

At the other extreme of conflict, war has no rules. While technically there are some rules of engagement, there is a saying among warriors that if you find yourself in a fair fight your tactics suck. So preparation must occur whether for sport or war with these parameters in mind.

WINNING FIGHTS

Again, this affects only about 10 percent of your preparation in terms of evaluating your physical strengths, weaknesses, the level of your training, and whether you live in or travel to a dangerous area and are more likely to encounter violence. The remaining 90 percent of preparation is mental. Sun Tzu called this knowing oneself, which is as important as knowing your enemy. It's Ronda Rousey knowing she can fight even with a broken toe. She says pain is just information. It's the Navy Seals "never-give-up" attitude. Each individual Seal isn't necessarily the very best fighter. What sets them apart is that Seals are so mentally tough that they will keep fighting regardless of how many times they are knocked down. It is a mental toughness shared by many Special Operators.

Sun Tzu, Rousey, and Navy Seals understand pushing beyond physical limitations. We discuss fortitude later, but knowing mental limits is important. Good fighters prepare in order to know these limits. A fighter doesn't want to learn his limits during a fight. Good preparation helps push those limits higher with this first principle impacting the last.

Bruce Lee was a great martial artist and spoke often regarding the process of self-cultivation. Both ancient and modern warriors recognize that mental preparation must occur first and foremost. The inner battle must be won before attempting to prevail in any external battle.

If you size up your physical preparation and have an idea of who your enemy might be and prepare accordingly—how do you size yourself up? This answer is also found in ancient wisdom.

Japanese military strategists often reflected the Chinese Taoist concepts of Wu-Sing, or the Five Elements of earth, air, water, fire, and void, as the Gojo-Goyoku.⁸ They applied these concepts to the mind as five feelings or weaknesses. This was part of the black art of the Ninja who utilized the five weaknesses to defeat an enemy:

1. Fear
2. Lust
3. Anger
4. Greed
5. Sympathy

PRINCIPLE ONE: PREPARATION

Though these feelings or emotions change dynamically there is always one that dominates. Understanding the weaknesses that dominate yourself and your opponent is vital to winning. A fighter must overcome personal weakness while exploiting the weakness of an opponent.

For example, sympathy may be a weakness in a pacifist who abhors violence. This sympathy creates an internal conflict, as the individual is not mentally prepared to harm others even if under threat. This is a serious limitation that can be exploited by a violent person.

Usually, anger overcomes sympathy. Someone wishing to harm the children of even a passive mother will cultivate the mother's anger. Any sympathy she may have for the attacker will immediately disappear as she directs her anger toward the attacker in order to protect her children. This is the balance of emotions that occur and manifest themselves as either strengths or weaknesses.

Fear is the most common weakness a fighter must overcome. Though anger can overcome fear, it too must be under control. Uncontrolled anger results in recklessness, and uncontrolled fear can be paralyzing.

The basic internal preparation for controlling fear is recognizing it is perceptual. It is not something a fighter overcomes as it can be controlled much like anger. Like anger, fear can be focused to good use.

Nelson Mandela said that courage wasn't the absence of fear but the triumph over it.⁹ Plato described courage as knowing what not to fear.¹⁰ The point being that fear has its place and is a natural response to perceived threats. It simply needs to be focused so that it doesn't become irrational and result in paralysis of action. Understanding internal weaknesses and the opposing motivation to overcome that weakness is vital to mindful preparation.

Firearms instructors advise students that if they are not prepared to utilize their weapon to kill someone in the event their life is threatened, then they probably should not be carrying a weapon. Carrying a weapon is one thing. Mentally knowing you are prepared to use it is quite another. If someone carrying a weapon isn't prepared to use it, then they may be bringing a weapon for their attacker to use against them. Being prepared is understanding individual weaknesses and mentally overcoming those weaknesses.

WINNING FIGHTS

Men perish for lack of vision is an old proverb. A winning attitude that overcomes weaknesses is vital to good preparation and creates a winning vision. Science supports this ancient proverb as you must first see yourself winning.

VISUALIZATION

There is a story about an American prisoner of war in Vietnam who for seven years was isolated from others and had little physical activity in confinement. However, during his entire time in captivity he visualized himself playing golf at his favorite courses every day. He imagined himself dressed in golf clothes. He included every detail of the experience in his mind down to the fragrance of the trees and how he gripped the club. He pictured each ball rolling across the green.

He was in no hurry. He was in captivity and not going anywhere. So he mentally played golf. Upon his release, he returned home and when he played golf for real the first time his game had actually improved.¹¹

Regardless of how true the story was, it has been confirmed by research. Studies with athletes including Olympians have concluded that visualization techniques aid performance improvement. Visualization is now an accepted training technique and a part of sports science, as there is a powerful relationship between mental and physical performance. It is a useful preparation tool.

Research has demonstrated that brain activity patterns among weight lifters were the same whether the weight lifter actually lifted a large weight or simply imagined it.¹² This is remarkable knowledge. The brain doesn't differentiate signaling for thought and signaling for action in terms of areas activated by the brain. Whether we are conducting the action or not, it still enhances the same area of the brain.

A study by Ranganathan et al., "From Mental Power to Muscle Power—Gaining Strength by Using the Mind," even revealed that mental practice was almost as effective as physical practice.¹³ Furthermore, doing both was more effective than doing either alone. Specifically, those who went to the gym had a 30 percent muscle increase. Those who conducted mental exercise were able to experience a 13.5 percent increase. Mental

PRINCIPLE ONE: PREPARATION

visualization alone achieved nearly half the increase as physical application. This is the power of thought.

Thoughts simply produce the same mental instructions as action. The key is engaging as many of the senses as possible during visualization practice. Emotions, smells, sights, hearing, and the environment that is visualized are all important. Walt Disney reportedly said, “If you can dream it, you can do it.” (The quote was actually written by Imagineer Tom Fitzgerald at Disney.)¹⁴ His view was literally visionary, as the power of visualization is greater than imagined decades ago as it relates to physical performance.

Understand that violent encounters are possible. Visualize violent encounters that may occur. Then mentally and physically prepare your actions. Have a vision for what you will do. This preparation has value.

Most people have no idea what they would do when faced with violence let alone prepare through visualization. They have never thought about it. Therefore they never train for it. They never prepare. When confronted with violence, they perish for lack of vision. This lack of mental preparation results in paralysis of action, which may lead to deadly consequences.

RECOGNITION

Mindful recognition of hostility is important. If you recognize conflict, know your enemies regarding where conflict will originate, and understand when violence is escalating, then you will be prepared to stop violence sometimes before it even begins. After all, the best way to win a fight is to avoid one. The best way to start preparing for violence is to imagine what you would do if violence were encountered. Thoughts occur before action as nothing happens without a thought.

An approaching stranger asking for a cigarette may seem innocent. But often this may be a ruse for a predator to get closer to his prey. An acquaintance may suggest a private meeting somewhere. This may be innocent as well. But if either subtle act seems out of context, both could be precursors to violence. Mental preparation for these encounters is important as well as recognizing patterns of behavior that just don't fit the context.

WINNING FIGHTS

ANTICIPATE

A friend returning from a war zone related that one of the primary means of survival was to constantly discern friend from foe before anyone was allowed to approach the troops. They didn't obsess over it, but they were always mentally prepared for conflict at every turn and incorporated constant preparedness in their daily routine.

This may seem paranoid. But preparation means controlling how close someone gets to you and preparing for potential conflict, even during seemingly ordinary circumstances that are part of your daily routine. It is these innocent encounters that often escalate quickly and paralyze those who fail to prepare for the escalation of an innocent encounter. Controlling your environment does have its limitations. But being able to control more space around you affords you more safety. Verbal and non-verbal communication of boundaries is important. Anticipate violence from anyone who crosses these boundaries.

It is the ability to be alert that helps counter the element of surprise afforded to aggressors. Preparation helps mitigate the paralysis of action that occurs with sudden violence. Being aware is another principle discussed later. But one must prepare first in order to develop the skill of awareness.

MENTAL EDGE

Mental preparation combats the initial shock and inaction that accompanies the first moments of unexpected conflict. Mindful preparation of knowing the potential enemy and understanding what to do in the event the enemy strikes help maintain the presence of mind needed to overcome conflict.

There are basically three ways to mentally foreshadow and survive violence:

1. Avoid it entirely.
2. Escape if it can't be avoided.
3. Devastate the attacker's ability to fight if escape is not possible.

Avoiding and escaping require presence of mind. So again, two out of three methods to survive violence are mental. Both involve being prepared with a plan and being alert in order to execute a plan.

FIGHTING WITH TACTICS

WHILE STRATEGY and principles are broad goals, tactics are methods for accomplishing those goals. Every principle has tactical applications. Sun Tzu opined 2,000 years ago that strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory and tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.¹ This is why tactics must be understood along with principled strategy.

A fighter must bridge principles with actual methods that employ each principle at the tactical level. Here are some brief approaches to bridging strategy and tactics for each principle. There are many others, but this is a basic start to understanding the foundational connection between principles and strategy and how they are interconnected.

PREPARATION

The principle of preparation requires a decision regarding what you will do when faced with conflict. You must decide in advance and prepare in some manner. If the fighter is a competitor, then he must know every aspect of the competitive arena. There are rules that must be prepared, the opponents he will face should be known, and even the size of the area of combat must be studied. The fighter must train his mind and body for the event.

WINNING FIGHTS

If the person has a goal of self-defense then there are many classes he or she can attend. Preparing to study martial arts requires understanding the level of interest and involvement the fighter wishes to invest. Preparing can begin in several ways and with classes such as hard styles, soft styles, classical approaches, or simply physical development gyms. Preparation involves many levels, from simple awareness to physical fitness conditioning or more advanced training, and should keep the interest of the practitioner.

Some people have little time to invest. Learning a martial art or going to the gym to work out every week doesn't fit their schedule. These individuals still must prepare for violent encounters or they will be the prey of predators. Preparation may involve different levels of investment for these folks, but it still must occur. They may wish to learn how to use weapons and certainly must plan their travels accordingly to avoid dangerous areas. Even trained fighters must prepare at this level by planning where they go and how they will react if violence greets them.

The point is to prepare on some level and then plan in advance as to how to apply this preparation. Deciding how you will react to violent encounters removes much of the fear of such encounters.

Businesses and nations have a whole different level of preparation. But on a tactical level they too must prepare a method to overcome challenges in their business or against enemies of the state. Tactical application of the principle depends on the scale of exposure that spans varying levels of investment and the scope of exposure ranging from individuals to nations. Decision models based on scenarios businesses or nations face on a broad scale should be incorporated into policy then tested and updated on a regular basis as threats change.

"What if" questions are a good way to start preparing on any level. What if a mugger faces you? What if multiple attackers appear? What if a weapon is produced? Reviewing potential scenarios and deciding on a course of action in advance is valuable to the tactical approach toward preparation. Anticipating encounters increases the level of preparedness. Mental and physical preparation on any level is vital.

AWARENESS

Knowing violence can occur and anticipating it is most of the battle. Keeping a 360-degree awareness of surroundings is important. This is an era of technology, which demands our attention. Those who wish to be aware of their surroundings cannot get sucked into their technology.

On a tactical level, fighters must look and anticipate. Sizing up situations is an instinct. People know when something isn't quite right or is out of place. To know what is normal in your surroundings and become very suspicious when patterns are broken is the tactical application of being aware. Again, awareness is more than being alert. Awareness is placing suspicions and broken patterns into context.

Putting away cell phones and looking around is the simplest way to increase awareness. Avoiding dangerous situations is a practical tactic. Seeing and knowing are symbiotic tactical applications of the principle of awareness.

Having a plan of escape or attack in any given situation places the fighter at a tactical advantage. If preparation has given the fighter the tools to win a possible engagement then awareness is the last line of defense to avoid the necessity of implementing this preparation. But in the event violence cannot be avoided, awareness robs the attacker of the element of surprise. Awareness counters the tactical advantage typically given to a predator.

Violence seldom occurs suddenly. There is often a build-up and a chance for de-escalation or escape. A fight occurs when awareness, avoidance, and de-escalation fail. Awareness is more an attitude than a skill. To be alert is not the same as being paranoid. Tactically, the idea is to remain alert and aware of the input provided by the surroundings.

COMMITMENT

During college, a friend of mine taught judo. He was an exchange student from Japan. Some other martial artists and I were taking a break from learning some judo throws and engaged in some striking skill practice.

We were demonstrating our methods of striking and delivered a snapping kick to the groin. The kick was focused on the groin. My Japanese

WINNING FIGHTS

friend said we were doing it all wrong. We were not committing fully to the action by simply focusing a kick to the groin only on the groin itself.

If we were fully committed to kicking someone between the legs and doing damage, we should not aim at the groin. We should aim for the chin. "If kicking groin, do not aim at groin. Aim at chin," he said in broken English.

He did this while motioning with his hands that we should visualize attempting to kick through the groin and up through the opponent's whole body to reach the chin. That was the greatest lesson I ever had regarding commitment to an action.

On a tactical level, commitment is a sense of certainty. It is being decisive and following a course of action. The tactical method to accomplish the principle of commitment is to make a decision in an unwavering fashion and acting on the decision with vigor. It is the same process you follow when jumping off a cliff to dive into the water below. At some point, you have to jump. One foot cannot be on the cliff and one foot off the cliff. You have to fully commit.

The Samurai applied this principle to every aspect of their life. We should as well. Full commitment has benefit in tactical application whether you are fully committing to a job, a marriage, a task, or a fight. If you leap into the task at hand, there is complete focus.

There must be no uncertainty. Once you have committed to an action in a decisive manner uncertainty will diminish. Tactically, the whole focus should then be on that action.

LETHALITY

Ruthless vigor is a good way to describe this principle in a tactical sense. Being ruthless is a way to win a fight. The practical tactical application of lethality in civil society requires varying degrees of aggression. There can only be enough force to repel the attack. This is why many law enforcement agencies have a caveat of scaled aggression when applying this principle. This is the reason the principle isn't simply being ruthless but having the potential to be lethal. So the caveat is to use just enough force to repel the attack.

FIGHTING WITH WEAPONS

WEAPONS ARE AN extension of the fighter. The Samurai even considered the sword to be an extension of their souls. The weapon assumes the character of whoever wields it, as the weapon is simply a tool that extends the will of the fighter. The principles of fighting with empty hands also apply to fighting with weapons. A fight is a fight. But there are some thoughts about these principles that should be noted.

A weapon is a great equalizer and a force multiplier. A sufficiently armed weak or elderly person can repel the attack of a much stronger attacker or multiple aggressors. A weapon can save lives and prevent injury if an attack is prevented by this show of force.

Revealing that the victim has a weapon can discourage an attacker from causing injury in many cases. Even a fighter capable of effective unarmed combat who possesses a weapon might be able to avoid a fight if the attacker believes the fighter has a weapon that multiplies the fighter's effectiveness. An aggressor may be willing to take his chances with a fighter in an unarmed engagement. But if the aggressor thinks a weapon may become engaged he may change his mind and seek an easier target. The balance of power shifts the odds dramatically when weapons are employed.

WINNING FIGHTS

Weapons make up for size. Police officers must sometimes fill out a use of force form every time they use physical force to restrain an offender. One particular officer at a local police department where I used to work was a small guy. He was called into the chief's office one day because he had more use of force forms on file than the rest of the department combined.

The small officer told the chief to take a look at how big he was compared to the other officers. When the large officers went to arrest someone, offenders complied easily. But when he tried to arrest someone, offenders thought they could overpower the officer because the officer would be judicious with his use of weapons. Therefore, he got into more fights because he is smaller. A criminal will target victims he perceives as easy prey who can be overpowered. A weapon changes that balance of power.

Criminals in prison have been interviewed in order to learn what deters them most from committing crimes. Consistently, criminals cite armed victims as the greatest deterrent.

The Centers for Disease Control came to a similar conclusion in 2013 as part of a \$10 million study commissioned by President Obama. According to their research, "Studies that directly assessed the effect of actual defensive uses of guns (i.e., incidents in which a gun was 'used' by the crime victim in the sense of attacking or threatening an offender) have found consistently lower injury rates among gun-using crime victims compared with victims who used other self-protective strategies." The study goes on to say that almost all national estimates reveal defensive use of guns by victims is as common as offensive uses by criminals.¹

Carrying and deploying a weapon should be a thoughtful process. One should never carry a weapon without being trained in its use. A weapon should also not be carried if you are not willing to use it if necessary. Otherwise, you've just brought a weapon for the aggressor to use against you.

A knife is the most common carry weapon. Laws should be examined in the area the knife will be carried in order to ensure compliance with local laws.

In a fight, a knife should be felt, not seen. It is why a rapid deployment system must be considered. In other words, a knife that deploys as it is

FIGHTING WITH WORDS

A MONK ASKED the chief priest if he could smoke while he prayed. The chief priest denied the request. Another monk asked the chief priest if he could pray while he smoked. The chief priest agreed to the request from the second monk.¹

The ultimate result was that both monks were doing the exact same thing. They both had the intention of smoking and praying at the same time. But each framed their words to the chief priest differently and received different responses. This is the power of words and framing those words. The power of words is understood and utilized by many methods such as cognitive bias, misdirection, or framing. Warriors may not like the fact that words are also weapons, but the concept isn't new. In fact, words are typically the first weapons drawn during a fight.

As mentioned earlier, a Samurai warrior possessed a *mushin* mind-set. Again, though *mushin* is sometimes translated as “disinterested,” it doesn't mean uninterested. It means the Samurai approached activity in a dispassionate manner or with an unbiased mind-set. He wasn't easily moved by words. He was flexible and had a calm, still center. This concept is especially applicable to fighting with words.

WINNING FIGHTS

When under verbal assault, a fighter must be like a willow tree, which bends and survives heavy winds by its flexibility. It is the same approach taught by aikido, jujutsu, and judo. Using an opponent's strength against him has power. Controlling a situation by acting in a malleable manner is adapting to different levels of cognitive bias, intelligence, or behavior. Like aikido, deflection and redirection work much better than direct confrontation, even in verbal assaults.

Verbal attack expects disagreement. When a verbal attack is confronted with agreement in some fashion, the verbal attacker doesn't know what to do, as the response is disarming.

Finding any semblance of common ground, accepting what comes and dealing with it calmly and dispassionately requires quite a bit of discipline. This discipline can be in short supply during modern times but it comes from contentment with oneself. We find this wisdom in many ancient philosophies from Buddhism, to Taoism and Christianity.

Worrying or getting upset in a verbal confrontation doesn't change a hair on anyone's head. Submission to life's hardships in the sense that hardships, harsh words, and challenges are a natural part of life disarms words of much of their power over you.

This doesn't mean to take words or challenges lying down. It simply means it is better to ride out a wave in a storm than fight against the water and drown. It was this notion that Yamamoto Tsunetomo had in mind where his thoughts were written in *The Hagakure*: "There is something about a rainstorm. When meeting with a sudden shower, you try not to get wet and run quickly along the road. But doing such things as passing under eaves of houses, you still get wet. When you are resolved from the beginning, you will not be perplexed, though you still get the same soaking. This understanding extends to everything."²

Moshe ben Maimon was a twelfth-century Jewish rabbi famous for saying one should accept the truth from whatever source it proceeds.³ There are numerous sources throughout ancient literature that urge calmness of spirit and mind in the face of conflict. Truth is truth.

When it rains, accept that you will get wet. Accept that words are often meant to be painful. Accepting certain truths eases internal tension. Calmness provides you with an edge when words are drawn as weapons.

INDEX

- accountable, 169, 199
Achilles, 193
Achilles in Vietnam (Shay), 11
aggression, 53, 55, 57, 117, 177
 aggressiveness, 54, 115–116, 183–184
 anger, 63
 efficient, 67
 disciplined, 62
 fierce, 128
 Grossman on, 56
 laws, 14
 levels of, 54, 58, 60, 176
 peace and, 61
 ruthless, 116
 vehicle of, 59
 vikings, 124
aikido, 123, 126, 220
 Goleman and, 71
airman's creed, 158
Alexander the Great, 122
Algren, Nathan, 81
Ali, Muhammad, 104
ambush, 25, 133–135, 211
American Pistol Institute, 77
American Revolution, 137
anger, 5, 15, 117, 194, 227, 231
 controlled, 77
 Freud and, 63
 Proverbs, 226
 wrathful, 214
Anspaugh, David (*Rudy*), 96
anticipation, 8, 24, 133, 135, 175
Apache, 124
apostle Paul, 98, 109
Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, 69
Aristotle, 27, 183
Armstrong, Neil, 227, 228
Art of War, The (Sun Tzu), 1–4, 15, 119, 223
 deception, 58, 95, 184
 efficiency, 67
 habits, 233
 King Wu, 42–43
 knowing the enemy, 30
 Mao, 92
 power, 100
 surprise, 133, 138
 tactics, 173
Artwohl, Alexis, 59
attitude, 2, 4, 60, 165, 186
 awareness and, 175
 body language and, 227
 Eastern, 49
 fortitude and, 153–154
 grit and, 156
 power of, 48
 winning, 6
Aurelius, Marcus, 166
awareness, 3, 8, 25, 28, 30, 34, 36, 37, 89, 138,
 164, 174, 209, 215
 alertness and, 21
 in *The Bourne Identity*, 26
 concentration, 98
 countering surprise, 133–134, 136–137, 138–140
 discernment, 27
 focus, 106
 Honour Based Awareness Network, 198
 inattention blindness, 22
 internal, 29
 OODA, 35
 practice, 33
 preventative, 23–24
 self and, 100
 spiritual, 99
 tactical application of, 175, 187
 Tueller rule and, 213
Ayoob, Massad, 25, 76

Baba Yaga, 120
basal ganglia, 182
Bastogne, 159
Battle of Trenton, 135
Better Angels of Our Nature, The (Pinker), 61, 121
Black Belt Magazine, 81
Blackwater USA, 61
blitzkrieg, 90
bokken, 82
Book of Five Rings, The (Musashi), 14, 53, 99
Boom, Corrie ten, 46–47
Bourne Identity, The (Ludlum), 26, 33, 37, 126, 128
boxing, 63, 90, 93
 kickboxing, 224
Boxing Commission, 91, 237
Boyd, John, 35, 144–146
Brazilian jujutsu, 123
Bryant, Tim, 12
budo, 117–118
bullies, 62, 167
bully, 187, 193, 232, 222, 231
Bushido, 123, 192, 195–196
 restrictions, 197
Bushido: The Soul of Japan (Inazo Nitobe), 194
Butler, Taran, 120

INDEX

- California Highway Patrol (CHP), 78
Campbell, Rick, 12
cerebral cortex, 88, 108
Chabris, Christopher, 22
character, 166–168, 192, 205, 233
 bu, 118
 discipline and, 80–81, 84
 honorable, 164
 integrity, 195
 Lao Tzu on, 170
Chesterton, G. K., 56
chi, 100
Chiang Kai-shek, 92
Chopra, Deepak, 110
Christensen, Loren, 56, 149
Churchill, Winston, 104, 119
Cicero, 209
Clausewitz, Carl von, 92, 139
cognitive bias, 219–220
cognitive dissonance, 11
Columbine High School, 134
combat, 12, 16, 62, 67, 125–128, 169
 Boxing Commission, 237
 classical honor and, 199, 200
 close quarters, 46
 combat arts, 89, 122–123
 crime, 166
 Filipino, 207
 Horne on, 35
 Maori, 124
 mental preparation, 8
 mind-set, 213–214
 On Combat book, 56
 Pareto applied, 57
 Shay on, 11
 surprise and, 36, 140
 weapons, 205
commitment, 41, 44, 47, 50, 165, 192
 classical honor and, 199
 Cortez and, 45
 decisiveness and, 42–43
 desperation, 46
 fleeting, 166
 focus, 182
 lack of, 155
 loyalty and, 195
 Matthew 16:25, 49
 physical aspects of, 48
 tactical application of, 175–176
 under stress, 80
 weapons and, 213
compassion, 117, 194
concentration, 53, 60, 98, 107–108, 143, 182, 213
confidence, 14, 17, 26, 83, 117, 155
conflict, 1, 3, 5, 9–14, 16–18, 21, 23, 44, 67, 163,
 164, 173, 220
 anticipation of, 8
 armed, 211
 brain and, 154
 efficiency and, 68, 72–73, 178
 Epaminondas on, 185
 honor and, 192–193
 Korean, 180
 measuring, 62
 mindful recognition, 7
 mind-set, 214
 Ninja, 197
 On Combat book, 56
 resolution, 30–31
 verbal, 222, 231, 233–234
 Vietcong, 69
 weapons, 215
Confucius, 109, 186, 193
Cooper, Jeff, 58, 77, 82, 115–116, 178, 213–214
Coppola, Francis Ford, 27
Cortez, Hernan, 45–46
countersurprise, 139
courage, 5, 47, 56, 156, 159, 183–184, 194, 196,
 199
Couture, Randy, 2
Creating Affluence (Chopra), 110

Damon, Matt, 26
Deadly Force Encounters (Christensen and
 Artwohl), 59
Demeere, Wim, 149
Dempsey, Jack, 118
desire, 57, 103, 155, 157, 164, 192, 222, 233
discipline, 17, 60, 64, 77, 81–82, 91, 105, 160,
 167, 169–170, 180, 213, 224
 aggression and, 62
 aggression tempered by, 58
 attention spans and, 166
 control, 83
 ferocity, 183
 firing, 78
 focus, 103
 fortitude, 186
 General Mattis on, 178–179
 motivation and, 63, 84
 self-discipline, 29–30, 195
 stress and, 79–80
 Sun Tzu, 42
 verbal, 220, 223
Duckworth, Angela, 157
duty, 195, 198

Earp, Wyatt, 62
effectiveness, 72–73, 89, 104, 122, 137, 178, 205
efficiency, 64, 67–73, 77, 123, 177–178, 213
Einstein, Albert, 93, 104
emotion, 5, 7, 10, 29–30, 46, 63, 77, 81–82, 107,
 154–155, 231
Emotional Intelligence (Goleman), 71
Enola Gay, 118
Enter the Dragon (film), 15
Epaminondas, 185
Ephesians, 109
escrima, 123, 207–208

faith, 12, 98, 109, 155
fear, 4–5, 16, 30, 47, 49, 53–55, 80, 117–122,
 128, 157, 174, 180, 214
 Bruce Lee and, 90
 death and, 196
 Freud and, 63
 John Wayne and, 159
 Rick Warren and, 233

- Takuan and, 107
 weapons, 215
- ferocious, 115–117, 119–123, 128, 183
- Ferriss, Tim, 63
- fierceness, 55, 115–117, 119, 165, 183, 184
- Filipino, 123, 207–208
- firearms, 5, 25, 58, 120, 177, 179, 196, 214
- Fitzgerald, Tom, 7
- Flash, The, 93
- focus, 13, 47–48, 64, 83, 95, 111, 135, 155, 158, 166, 181, 186, 213, 226
- aikido, 71
- aggression, 55, 58, 63
- awareness and, 34
- blitzkrieg, 90
- cerebral cortex study, 89
- chi, 99–100
- commitment, 41
- Cooper on, 214
- Corrie ten Boom on, 46
- discipline, 77, 80, 179
- efficiency, 67, 72–73
- ferocity and, 117, 122, 128
- friend or foe and, 28
- General McChrystal on, 69
- goal, 164
- inattention blindness and, 23
- internal awareness, 29–30
- John Wick* and, 120
- life and, 109–110
- managing, 104–105
- mushin, 106–107
- Newhall incident, 78
- OODA loop, 146
- praus*, 121
- Qui-gonn Jinn character on, 109
- Samurai, 81–82
- school study, 17
- spiritual, 98
- tactical, 108, 182–183
- Takeda Shingen and, 103
- uncertainty and, 45
- unfocus, 15
- verbal, 228
- force, 30, 43, 60, 158, 177–178, 192, 195
- aggression, 62
- anger and, 63
- chi, 99
- commitment and, 44–45
- Deadly Force Encounters*, 59
- discipline, 83–84, 179
- efficiency, 73
- ferocity, 116–117, 125
- focus, 105
- General McChrystal on, 70
- I-Ching, 68
- lethality, 53–54, 176
- Mongols, 121
- Napoleon, 148
- physics and, 48
- power, 87, 90, 94, 180–182
- restraint, 57–58
- S. L. A. Marshall on, 56
- Spartans, 185
- spiritual, 98
- surprise, 133, 136, 137, 184
- Vietcong, 69
- weapons, 205–206, 208, 213
- Forged in Fire* (TV program), 208
- fortis fortuna adiuvio*, 120, 167
- fortitude, 4, 153–154, 157–160, 164–165, 167, 186
- grit and, 156
- tactical application, 187
- French Foreign Legion, 201
- Freud, Sigmund, 63
- Frontinus, 138
- Gandhi, Mahatma, 115
- Geronimo, 125
- Gibson, Mel, 108
- Gilroy, Tony, 26
- goal, 13, 41, 47–48, 60, 69, 80, 95, 147, 155–156, 165
- criminals, 120
- discipline, 82–84
- Ferriss on, 63
- focus, 108–111
- fortitude, 154, 186
- General McRaven on, 160
- grit, 157
- OODA loop, 146
- peace, 118
- power, 92–93
- restraint, 57
- school study, 17
- surprise, 138
- tactics, 173–174
- verbal, 230
- Godel's incompleteness theory, 146
- Godfather, The* (Puzo), 27
- Gojo-Goyoku, 4
- Goleman, Daniel, 71
- Goliath, 96, 167
- Gray, John, 61
- greed, 4
- Greene, Robert, 92
- Green Hornet, The, 88
- Grit* (Duckworth), 157
- Grossman, Dave, 56
- gun, 24, 28, 29, 36, 53–54, 58, 207, 228–229
- CDC study, 206
- Cooper on, 115, 213–214
- D.C. gun ban, 209–210
- Earp, Wyatt, 62
- efficiency, 178
- focus, 109
- force multiplier, 136–137
- gun control, 211, 231–232
- gun fu, 120
- Gunsite Academy, 77
- Leatham on, 215
- lethality, 177
- Lott on, 61
- Musashi, 82
- Newhall incident, 78
- surprise, 134
- Tueller rule, 212
- Wilkins on, 79

INDEX

- gun fu, 120
Gunsite Academy, 77
- Hadrian, Emperor, 118
Hagakure, The (Yamamoto Tsunetomo), 46–47, 220
- Hetherington, Tim, 110
Hick-Hyman Law, 146
Hillaker, Harry, 144
Hombu dojo, 71
honor, 125, 169, 191–201, 233
 character, 164, 166–167
 Commando Kelly, 56
 groups, 123–124, 168
 Kuhr on, 225
 military, 158
 moral codes, 11–12
 Rudy, 97
 Samurai, 83
 war of words, 235
Horne, Patrick Van, 35
- I-Ching, 68
Iliad, The (Homer), 193
Inazo Nitobe, 194
Integrity, 88, 193, 195, 198, 200, 224, 233
In the Gravest Extreme (Ayoob), 25
“Invisible Gorilla” study, 22
irrational belief, 154
Israel Defense Forces, 122
Iyengar, Sheena, 146–147
- Jastrow, Robert, 100
Jenkins, Jerry, 223
Jinn, Qui-gonn (*Star Wars* character), 109
John Wick (film), 120–121, 126, 128, 167
Joint Special Operations Command, 69
Jordan, Michael, 156
judo, 2, 123, 175, 220, 222
 verbal judo, 223, 228, 234
jujutsu, 123, 127, 220
 ketsugo do, 127, 237
Jung, Carl, 223
Junger, Sebastian, 110
- Kamen, Robert Mark, 43
karambit, 208
Karate Kid, The (film), 43
Keller, Gary, 72
Kelly, Charles “Commando,” 56
ketsugo do jujutsu, 127, 237
Khan, Genghis, 121–122
kiai, 106
kinetic linking, 88–90, 93–94, 105, 181
King, Stephen, 104
King of Wu, 42–43
King Solomon, 1, 191
knife, 36, 106, 123, 136, 207, 211, 215
 common carry, 206
 range, 208
 speed, 212
knights, 124, 196, 201
Korengal Valley, 110
krav maga, 122, 211
- Kuhr, Michael, 224–227, 229, 234
Kung Fu, 99
Kyokushin karate, 87
- Lao Tzu, 170
law of reciprocity, 98
Leach, John, 80
LEAPS, 223
Leatham, Rob, 214–215
Lee, Bruce, 4, 27, 88–90, 107–108, 208
 efficiency, 67, 72
 Enter the Dragon, 15
 focus, 104
 Long Beach, 87
 size, 48
 speed, 92–94, 181
Lepper, Mark, 146–147
lethality, 54, 57–64, 165, 177, 208
 aggression, 55, 176, 183
 defined, 53
 General McChrystal on, 70
Lewis, Joe, 125
Lincoln, Abraham, 118
Locke, John, 209
Long Beach International Karate Championships, 87
Longstreet (TV program), 107
Lord Naoshige, 46
Lott, John, 61–62
Lovette, Ed, 25
loyalty, 192, 195, 198
lust, 4
- Magellan, Ferdinand, 123
Maimon, Rabbi Moshe ben, 220
Malaysia, 122–123
Mandela, Nelson, 5
Maori, 124
Mao Tse-tung, 92
Marcaida, Doug, 208
Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, 122
Marshall, S. L. A., 56
Martin, Frank, 2
Mastering Karate (Oyama), 87
Master Ummon, 81
Masutatsu Oyama, 87–90
Mattis, James, 178–179, 201
Mayweather, Floyd, Jr., 90
McAuliffe, Anthony, 158
McChrystal, Stanley A., 69–70
McRaven, William, 83, 159–160
Meiji Restoration, 196
Mella, Alberto, 18
militia, 209–210
Miller, Johnny, 9, 16, 31–32, 44, 127
mindfulness, 98
mind-set, 13–14, 21, 46, 49, 59, 64, 107, 117, 219, 223
 combat, 213–214
Ming dynasty, 122
Mings, 122
Miyamoto Musashi (Samurai), 14, 48, 53, 67, 77, 107
MMA, 48, 119

- Mogadishu, 70
 Mongol Empire, 121–122
More Guns, Less Crime (Lott), 61
 Morihei Ueshiba, 71
 Moses, 92
 motivation, 63, 83–84, 156, 187, 193, 199
 mushin, 106–107, 219, 223, 225

 name-calling, 232–233
 Napoleon, 68
 National Black Belt Leagues, 125, 237
 Navy Seals, 4, 83, 157, 186
 “never-give-up” attitude, 4, 12, 153, 155–156, 159–160
 Newhall, 78
 Newton, Isaac, 48
 New York Police Department, 78
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 95
 Ninja, 4, 123–124, 196–198
 Norris, Chuck, 125
 Nunes, Amanda, 2

 Obama, Barack, 206
 objective, 30, 42, 73, 146, 159, 163–164, 182, 185, 198
 offensive action, 1, 69, 137, 143
 offensive surprise, 133, 136, 137–138, 143
On Combat (Grossman), 56
One Thing, The (Keller and Papasan), 72
 OODA, 35, 144–146
 Orwell, George, 232–233

 pacifism, 115
 Pareto, 56–57, 73
Patriot, The (film), 108
 Patton, George S., 43–44, 55, 67
 peace, 16, 54, 117–118, 139, 168–170, 183–184, 230
 altruistic, 61
 Aurelius on, 166
 Gandhi on, 115
 gardener and, 53
 inner, 47
 Mattis on, 179
 On Combat, 56
 peacekeepers, 58–59, 116
 populace and, 137
 preserving and, 1
 reality, 9
 self-control, 17
 Sun Tzu and, 43
 Tolle on, 111
 The Bourne Identity and, 26
 perseverance, 156, 159–160, 168
 Pinker, Steven, 61–62, 121
 Pitt-Rivers, Julian, 199
 Pizzo, Angelo, 96
 Plato, 5, 159
 Pliny the Elder, 49
 power, 6, 62, 87–100, 144, 155, 180–182, 205
 Baba Yaga, 120
 Bushido, 194–195
 commitment, 42, 48
 desperation, 46
 destructive, 54
 discipline, 80
 fierceness, 117
 focus, 103–104, 109
 Glasser’s control theory, 17
 grit, 157
 gun control, 210
 Maori, 124
 Mattis on, 201
 praus, 167
 regimes, 209
 surprise, 133, 139–140, 184
 thought and, 7
 Tolle on, 111
 weapons, 206, 208, 211–213
 words, 219–220, 223, 226
praus, 121, 167
 Predictors of Success in Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) Training, 157
 preparation, 1–17, 133–134, 163–165, 173–174, 211
 awareness, 21, 23, 175
 commitment, 41
 focus, 103
 surprise, 134, 136–138, 140, 143
 tactics, 181, 186–187
 weapons, 215
 Proverbs, 1
 Public School 49, 16
 Puller, Chesty, 180

 Ranganathan study, 6
 reactions, 80, 110
 Reagan, Ronald, 1, 104, 118
 recognition, 7
 Reeves, Keanu, 120, 167
 reframing, 231–232
 relaxation, 94
 Renatus, Publius Flavius Vegetius, 118, 138
Republic, The (Plato), 159
 respect, 17, 81, 117, 124, 191, 193–195, 199, 223, 225, 227–229
Restrepo (film), 110
 Rhee, Jhoon, 81
 Richardson, Scott, 25
 righteousness, 194
 Rochefoucauld, Francois de La, 194
 Rogers, Will, 118
 Roosevelt, Theodore, 226
 Rousey, Ronda, 2, 4, 48, 49
 Ruettiger, Daniel “Rudy,” 96–97
 Russell, Bill, 79
 ruthlessness, 115–116, 122, 177

 Samurai, 47–50, 56, 82–83, 110, 192, 201, 219, 225
 commitment, 176
 Inazo Nitobe on, 194–195
 jujutsu, 123, 127
 Musashi, 14–15, 53, 60, 77
 Ninja and, 124, 197–198
 service, 196, 234
 Shinto, 99–100
 timing, 185

INDEX

- Samurai (*continued*)
Tsunetomo as, 46
Ummon, 81
weapons, 205, 208
words, 223, 233
- Sasaki Kojiro (warrior), 82
- Schmitt, Carl, 27
- Scripture, 92, 96, 167
biblical, 99, 121, 225
Christian, 46, 220
Corinthians, 98
Ephesians, 109
Luke, 27
Matthew, 49
praus and, 121
Proverbs, 1, 225–226
- Sde-Or, Imi, 211
- Second Amendment, 209–210, 231–232
- self-control, 17, 30, 121, 180, 195
- Shaolin, 99–100
- Shay, Jonathan, 11
- Sherman, William, 143
- Shinobi, 197
- Silat, 122
- Simons, Daniel, 22
- space, 8, 14, 26, 34, 68, 111, 148, 212, 226
- Spartans, 124, 185, 196, 201
- Special Forces, 69, 110, 125, 164–165, 179
- speed, 25, 183, 221
awareness, 26
efficiency, 67–68, 73
power, 87–94, 100, 180–182
surprise, 138–140
timing, 147–148
- spiritual focus, 49, 109, 111, 124, 170, 224
- spiritual power, 97–100, 168
- Sport Karate Amateur International, 125, 237
- Sun Tzu, 1–4, 15, 30, 42–43, 58, 67, 95, 100, 119, 223, 233
Mao and, 92
surprise, 133–138, 184
tactics, 173
- Superman, 93
- surprise, 133–140, 184–185, 214
awareness, 21, 23, 25, 36, 175
commitment, 41
discipline, 78, 81
fierceness, 117, 121, 183
focus, 103
preparation, 1, 8
timing, 143–144
weapons, 207, 213
- sympathy, 4
- synchronization, 147
- tactics, 3, 14, 82, 143, 173, 178, 187–188, 234
Vietcong, 69
- taekwondo, 81
- Takeda Shingen (warrior), 103
- Takuan Soho (monk), 107
- T'ang dynasty, 81
- tempo, 62–63, 143, 148–149
- tension, 11, 71, 94, 110, 220
- Thatcher, Margaret, 118
- Thebes, 122
- Third Marine Regiment, 120
- Thompson, George, 223, 229
- Thompson, Nathaniel, 31–32, 63, 221
- timing, 59, 108, 135–139, 143–149, 164–165, 184–186
- Tokyo, 71
- Tolle, Eckhart, 111
- Tools of Titans* (Ferriss), 63
- triune brain, 153
- Truman, Harry S., 118
- Tsukahara Bokuden (Samurai), 14
- Tueller rule, 212
- Tyson, Mike, 164
- Uke*, 126
- Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), 2
- United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez, 209
- U.S. Army soldier's creed, 158
- U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 69
- U.S. Constitution, 209–210
- U.S. forces, 53, 69, 110, 159
- U.S. Rangers' creed, 159
- U.S. Secret Service, 26
- verbal debate, 230–232, 234
- Verbal Judo (program), 220, 222–223, 228, 234
- Verbal Judo* (Thompson and Jenkins), 222
- Vietcong, 69, 137
- Vietnam, 6, 9, 11, 24, 69
- Vikings, 124
- violence, 3–4, 7–14, 31, 46, 55, 58, 61–62, 116–120, 125, 163, 168, 174, 233
Gandhi on, 115
honor, 200
Honour Based Violence Network, 198
tactics, 175, 183–184
warrior code and, 192–193
words, 222–231
- virtue, 81, 159, 192, 194–195
- visualization, 6–7, 186
- Voice of the Martyrs, 198
- Vujicic, Nick, 186
- Walt Disney, 7
- Warren, Rick, 233
- Washington, George, 1, 118, 135
- Wayne, John, 159
- weight training, 6, 93–94, 181
- West, James, 31
- What Is Karate* (Oyama), 87
- Wigram, Lionel, 79
- Wilkins, Burnis, 79
- Willink, Jocko, 84
- Yamamoto Tsunetomo (Samurai), 46, 220
- Yuan dynasty, 122
- Zande, 124
- Zulu, Shaka, 124



Photo by Gina Stephens

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