

A Special Report

Surviving Violence: The Missing Ingredient

An Interview with
Target-Focus Training Master Instructor,
Chris Ranck-Buhr

Q Chris, you have trained a lot of people over a number of years in dealing with violence, really dealing with criminal violence. If you look back over that whole time, is there a single focal point, really a single thing that people have a tendency to either miss or have trouble with more than anything else?

A. Yes, I think the essential problem is just that everyone thinks they know what violence is and the reality for most sane, socialized people is that we don't. We have no concept of what violence is. Even those of us that have been unfortunate enough to be involved in actual criminal violence and survived it, the experience is so chaotic there is really nothing that we can take away from it or learn from it other than that violence is scary and it's chaotic.

Most people come to this topic believing that they know what it takes to get the job done and to handle a situation involving criminal violence. Our biggest problem is being unwilling to do the work of a killer, to use the tools of a killer, to behave like a killer.

People drag their social norms into that arena. They think that the things they hold dear, the moral codes they have, and the "rules of engagement" are going to work for them in the realms of actual violence. They don't.

When we impose our social norms on top of training for violence we end up with things like martial arts or competitive sports involving martial arts. We also end up with self-defense. Even the idea of self-defense training misses the entire point of what has to happen in a real life violent confrontation.

What you have to ask yourself is, does a killer really worry that someone is going to use self-defense on him? That's the last thing that the killer -- the serial killer or murder, the robber or rapist, all the guys you REALLY need to worry about as opposed to the trained boxers or martial arts fighters everyone thinks they need to concern themselves with -- anyway, it's the last thing the true asocial criminal is concerned about. He's not worried that someone is going to use self-defense on him. He's not worried that someone is going to wrestle him.

We as sane, socialized people spend all of our time thinking about this event -- if a killer comes to murder you -- we think about this event as an engagement with rules, procedures, counters (trying to counter what the other guy is doing) instead of what needs to be done. The work that needs to be done is exactly the same work that the killer wants to do to you -- violence.

The killer knows, whether he knows it instinctually or whether he's had experience doing it or he's just crazy enough to not have any of those sane, social and moral codes that we have, he knows what makes violence work and what's going to work is for him is to shut you off. That's what he knows and he's going to go about his work immediately. He's not going to attempt to engage you, he's not going to attempt to set you up or he's not going to get into a fighting stance. He's not going to try to "defend himself" on you to death. That makes no sense whatsoever.

That's why I said before the very idea of, "Oh, I'm going to do self-defense training to prevent someone from killing me" is really silly because self-defense says nothing about the other guy. In point of fact what you have to do is you have to do terrible, horrible things to the other guy to shut him off -- before he does exactly that to you.

We have to adopt the tools of a killer, we have to adopt the techniques of a killer because what the killer uses is violence. He doesn't use self-defense; he doesn't use martial arts; he doesn't view it as a contest. He knows that there are things that he can do to you to shut you off and he is going to do those things first.

Now, if the word killer is too strong for you, then think criminal, think gun-toting robber, whatever you like. All asocial thugs think exactly this way. And the problem is you don't.

The only thing that a killer may be worried about is someone using violence on him and so from his point of view that's why he's going to do his best to get it done first. He knows that if he gives you an opportunity to get it done on him that it could very well be the end of him.

So the essential problem is that people believe they know what violence is yet the tools that they put together to try to counter that threat don't work. All they do is make us feel better about trying to get that work done; they don't actually get it done. They just let us feel morally superior and they let us live with ourselves.

What most people believe is that if we do the work of a killer, if we take on the tools of a killer, and if we use violence, then somehow that makes us evil, that it somehow makes us morally bankrupt just like the killer. In point of fact, violence just doesn't belong to murderers; it's simply a survival tool.

There are harsh realities about violence that are very, very different from the ideals inside of martial arts and combat sports and even inside of self-defense. So much of self-defense has to do with attempting to counter the threat instead of being a greater threat to this man than he is to you. It's the law of the jungle and at the end of the day the person that is doing the violence and survives it wins and gets to go home.

The person getting the violence done to them doesn't fair so well. At that point you just have to be lucky and hope that you survive your injuries and survive the experience but that's not enough.

The Virginia Tech Example

To give you a good case in point, if we look at the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, there was only one person there that understood how to use the tools of violence and that was the shooter. He was the only one. No one else there knew how to use the tool of violence.

There may have been people in that room and among the people that were unfortunately killed that had trained in self-defense or martial arts, or had experience in combat sports. We don't know.

But what I can tell you for sure is that there was only one person there who knew how to use the tool of violence and he was using it on other people. He was even able to take his time and reload and get the job done without having to worry about anyone even attempting to do anything about it other than once again, defensive tactics, defensive things, attempting to defend themselves.

Right there we get a very stark and awful reminder of the realities of violence and how self-defense is really insufficient in the face of cold, calculated killing. And in my mind that's our essential problem.

People come to our Target-Focus Training sessions believing that they know what is going on. When I hear the comments that people make when they first see our training, I always know who has experience with real violence and who doesn't. The people who have real experience with violence: they don't talk about it, they don't boast about it and typically I'll never even know until the training is over and they will come to me quietly and they will share their story with me.

Whether they killed in war or whether they experienced it personally as a law enforcement officer or they experienced it as a civilian, and even if they survived and won, it's not something that they boast about. And it's not something they swagger around with. They just come up quietly at the very end.

The people at the beginning of the course who have scoffed the most and sit there watching me talk with their arms crossed and a sneer on their face, the ones who are reluctant to even participate in the training in a meaningful way to help their training partner out, I know for a fact that those people don't have any experience with actual violence.

They may have a vast amount of experience with other forms of socialized violence that we think are effective because we they it on the mat, they do it in the dojo's and they do it in the ring. It appears to work. We've been told that it works because the people who are doing it to expect it to work or because we're doing it on people who aren't dedicated to killing us. So it's going to work in those scenarios. Self-defense is going to work in the self-defense class. But it is far less likely that it will be effective against the criminal sociopath.

I remember an investigative news magazine piece on TV that I saw a number of years back. They went and interviewed a self-defense instructor and they filmed self-defense courses happening. Then they went to death row and showed the videos to the prisoners who were there because they had murdered people and asked for their assessment. The criminals sat there and laughed their way through these videos. They were extremely amused and at the end they said, "Well, that's not what we do, that's not what works. It's a neat idea, but that's all it is. Nothing that they're showing in there is going to stop me from doing what I want to do."

That's sobering. That says you better take a look at what you're thinking is preparation.

Q. So what you're really saying is that even though there is a lot of talk and a lot of what seems like information on how to help yourself and what to do and everything, the really big thing is that you have to go back and point to is that when the chips are really down, people don't know what to do or how to do it in a way that's really going to save their lives. They are either not thinking about it or if they are, they think that some sort of training they've had in some shape or form is going to do it for them. But what you're saying is that it isn't. And along with that, how then do you go about training people? If they can't do it with their training now, how do you get them to where they actually can do it then?

A. Well, this is the thing, it's never a problem of pulling the trigger and what I mean by that is having someone want to murder you is very motivating and I think someone in that situation is more than willing to do anything to survive that situation.

Where the failure comes is that although they have the motivation and may want to do whatever they can to survive, they have no tools that are applicable in that environment. When people suddenly find themselves in a violent situation, none of the things that they have learned are actually going to work for them in that scenario.

Even Those Who Think They're trained in Using Violence, Probably Aren't.

We have the story about the top-level Jujitsu competitor who had two guys attack him in a parking lot. He took the first guy out. Then the second guy came at him with a knife. He got the knife attacker in an arm bar but when the guy "tapped out" he let go of the knife hand and the guy stabbed him several times with the knife.

This is a perfect example of what we're talking about. Here was a guy who was highly skilled, highly trained, and he executed flawlessly. In fact he did everything that he had been taught to do in his training. Unfortunately none of his training had taught about shutting people off using violence.

Technically the way violence is done and the way we talk about violence, he did not use violence because nothing he did was about destroying the other guy.

To give you a really base example of what he COULD have done, instead of putting the guy in a painful arm bar, he needed to break the elbow.

So the problem is that people train but they're not training for the realities of violence, for what really happens inside of there. And so when they get put in those situations, they find that the tools that they've been given are insufficient to get the job done.

To be quite frank about it, when someone wants to kill you, you need to be able to dig their eyeball right out of their skull. You need to be able to crush their throat. You need to know how to break their neck. You need to break their legs and you need to tear them apart even though they have hit a point where they no longer want you doing that to them.

Because if you can't and you haven't practiced doing this and this guy is committed to doing it to you, then you're basically screwed.

Again, it's doing the work of the killer; using the tool of violence. It means doing these things to another person who intends to otherwise do them to you.

Now, I'm not saying you end up having to do all that. You may get lucky and your first strike totally disables the guy to the point where you feel safe just walking away. If that happens, great. But just like the Jujitsu guy, you're much better safe than sorry. Remember, we're not talking here about social violence. Where this guy has the same morals as you and might beat you up a bit but then decide to just move on.

This is worst case. And that's why I said if you can back it off, great. But that's easy. What isn't easy, in fact it's nearly impossible, is thinking you can escalate your skills to the deal with a killer when you've never practiced for that at all.

If you need to break the guy's leg and then you need to kick him in the head when he's on the ground and then you need to stomp on his throat so that he can't breathe and he starts asphyxiating and he is going to die from that and then you need to do whatever else that you need to do in order to make sure that he doesn't get back up.

This is not a pretty picture and the problem is that people look at it as so way beyond any kind of training they've had because it essentially comes down to "curbing" people. This is the kind of stuff that when we look at it, we have a visceral reaction to it and we say that's awful and terrible and I'm not a bad person so I don't do things like that.

Unfortunately, until people figure out that the reason that criminals are successful -- the reason that terrorists are successful -- is because they already know how to use the tool of violence and they're willing to do so. They are ready to curb you. They're willing to put the bullet in your brain. They're willing to bury the knife in your neck and if you're not willing to do those things to another person, then there's not much that I can do for you.

As I said, most people can be pushed to a point where they would be willing to do those things to survive only to find out that they don't actually know how to do those things.

Q. So that's where we get back to the real missing key which for most people is even if they understand all of this -- what I need to do to survive, when push comes to shove and my life is on the line right now -- if I haven't trained for this, then I'm probably not going to be able to go do it, even if I want to?

A. That's correct. You're only going to be able to do what you've been trained. If you've trained for a set pattern or a set scenario, I can almost guarantee that's it's not going to happen according to that exact set-up that you've practiced for, time and time again. If you think that it's going to go down like a competition, where you're going to get someone in a submissive hold and they're going to tap out and quit and then it's going to be over then you're going to be in a lot of trouble.

In a ring, people tap out. In a social party situation or in a bar situation, people tap out. When someone wants to kill you, they don't tap out. So if you haven't actually trained to do violence to people then even if you're willing to do the violence, you're not going to be able to get the job done because you have no tools. You have nothing at that point. You had everything that you needed in the ring, you had everything that you needed in the dojo, but all of a sudden when it's time to shut another human being off, you have no idea where those buttons are. You don't know how to shut a human being off. You don't know how to get it done so that you know whether or not you got it done correctly and you don't know to get it done so that the guy doesn't get back up off the ground.

Q. You hear stories about rape cases where the woman dies, but they catch the rapist and he has scratches all over his face and right around his eyes but his eyes are intact and you hear

that and think, ah, the eyes are right there, she could obviously have reached them but didn't. Is that the kind of thing that you're talking about?

A. Yeah, because she probably had never been trained mechanically how to dig an eyeball out of somebody's skull and that's the difference. You know scratching someone's face, that's almost instinct, and it's headed in the right direction because it's a feature found on murderers who've killed somebody.

The paraorbital scratching, just like defense wounds are found on corpses. What it speaks to is the fact that mechanically that person had probably never been trained on how to dig an eyeball out of someone's skull so they are stuck with what they have instinctually at that point. They have no information for how to do violence and get the job done, how to effect that change, and how to get the results that are going to change the situation in their favor.

And digging that eyeball is really very, very easy. Unless you haven't practiced for it.

If you've never had anyone tell you that it's okay to do this to somebody when you're in this situation and never actually been taught mechanically how to do it, you don't have anything. It's not enough to have the idea and it's not enough to have the will. You must actually have the skill. It's a very small and simple skill but if you are not trained for it and you haven't been shown how to do it and you haven't practiced doing it, it's not going to be there for you.

Q. Everything that you're talking about is lethal. What we're talking about is life-or-death. What's missing in me being able to keep myself alive, why I'm not able to do this, whatever it would take? How do you train lethal types of things like that without causing somebody else irreparable harm?

A. Well, it comes down to target practice. Really, simply put, you have to practice accessing these targets on a human body. There are no two ways about it. There is no other way we can train. We can't do it in the air, we can't do it conceptually, you have to actually have another human body there and you have to actually look at it and find these targets on another human body and then practice accessing them in ways that are going to get the result you want.

For any given target, anything that we do needs to destroy that target's function so that the target doesn't work anymore. If we're talking about the eyes, you need to make sure that what we're doing will mechanically overcome the natural resilience of the tissue of the eyeball, of the muscles of the orbit and end up actually lacerating or bursting or avulsing that eyeball from the socket. If we're talking about the throat, we've got to make sure that what we're doing will actually crush the throat and collapse the airway. If we're talking about things like the groin, we need to make sure that mechanically what we're practicing would be expected to rupture one or both testicles. If we're talking about breaking the knee, we need to make sure that how we're practicing and what we're doing has the full engagement of your body weight, the full follow through and is actually going through the target in such a way that the knee is going to get snapped backwards so that the leg doesn't function anymore.

The only way that we can practice this is, like I said, it comes down to target practice. We have to go slow because once again, if we're talking about the eyes, the throat, the groin, the neck,

breaking the spine, doing these kinds of things to people, we can't go fast because that becomes extremely dangerous.

It's Just Like Firearms Training.

I think the easiest way to understand it is to think about target shooting and firearms. When you use a firearm, if the bullet misses the guy nothing happens. If the bullet hits the guy but doesn't hit anything important, very little is going to happen. You actually need to put the bullet into something important -- through the heart, through the lungs, open up the aorta, through brain tissue, through the spinal cord. And the only way you are able to fire a gun and have the bullet go through the place that you want it to go is to practice.

We shoot at paper targets on the range and we do that work slowly. We take our time. I mean you just don't pull out your gun and then blaze away at the target and then scroll the target down towards you and look at it and go, "Huh, it looks like I missed more times than I hit and I didn't actually get any of the bullets in the black, so I guess I need more practice," and so you run a new paper target back out, start blazing away again, haphazardly and then roll it back in only to go, "Huh, I'm still missing. Maybe I need more practice."

That method of practice is never going to increase your ability to put a bullet where you need it. What's going to actually help you out is by going slowly. You take the gun, you put in on the target, you aim carefully, you're trying to do all the things if you have a shooting instructor there that they're telling you how to do to improve your aim, and then you fire a round. Then you see where that round went and then you adjust. The next round that you fire, you relax, you take aim, you do your best to adjust to whatever error you were making in your target hitting before. And through this type of slow, deliberate practice with a firearm, you get to the point where you can put the bullet in the black and maybe even the bulls eye whenever you want which is what's going to make you effective with a firearm.

Well, it works the exact same way whether it's a bullet or your boot heel. It's going to end up being the exact same process and that's if you don't hit your target you're not going to have anything effective happen at all. We need to make sure that we are wrecking these anatomical features in people to shut them off. The only way that we're going to be able to practice that is to go slowly and so you need to take your time. You have the other human body right there with you, your training partner, you look at the target you want to access, you take your time making sure that you line everything up on it, you step through and strike that target nice and slow so that your partner can react to being struck there AND you get to feel what it's like.

But if we just went full contact as fast as we could, more often than not, you would miss most of what you wanted to do because it would be so haphazard and then, of course, it becomes dangerous because the target that we're accessing is something that is going to change people's life. So a lot of places when they're working in full speed, full contact, they're also not allowing you to go for the eyes, the throat, or the groin, or you're not allowed to stomp to the knee because if we did those things full speed, full contact, then we end up with a horrible injury that probably puts your partner in the hospital immediately and that's not an acceptable way to learn because we're going to run out of training partners very quickly. In essence, what's going to happen is that no one is going to learn a damn thing.

So it's really important to always think about this exactly the same way as firearms training. It's not until you've been using the firearm for awhile and you've got your accuracy up and you can actually put the bullet where you want to put it, that you can actually work on increasing your rate of fire. You can work on firing off more than one bullet at a time. That's exactly the same way as training with our bare hands and our boots. We have to take our time, we have to get it right and make sure that, number one, we're keeping our partner safe and then number two that we're actually getting it done in such a way that it's going to work. Once we have that, once we've built in that basic skill, we can work at a faster rate with our partner but it's always going to come back to the safety margin and we never, ever want to exceed that safety margin.

Now, how does this translate to doing violence on the street when your life depends on it? Well, out there we're completely unconcerned about the safety of the other man, obviously. This is why someone can come in and I can train them for a day and I would not allow them to work very fast with their training partners but if they went out into the parking lot immediately after the end of that session, it's scientifically proven that they could do it to someone full speed, as hard as they could to get the job done because they would have the accuracy.

During that day, the hours that I worked with them, I would have purely been working on accuracy and mechanically being correct so that they will get the result that they want. So that they will rupture the things that they want to rupture, they'll break the things that they want to break and I am completely unconcerned about them being able to do that and be effective. I'm much more concerned with them learning to go faster in the training environment and be safe because that's actually a much harder skill than hurting people.

Q. So by doing the training like that you now have a tool in your toolbox that when you need to call on it that it's there. The fact that you've done this even at a slow speed in a controlled environment, that tool, that lethal tool, is now in your toolbox and when you need it the adrenalin will kick in and give you what you need. The tool that wasn't there before -- the missing ingredient -- is now all of a sudden at your disposal and it turns you into someone who can actually make something happen in a life-or-death confrontation!

A. Exactly.

For more information

If you'd like more information on how to acquire the skills described in this Special Report, you have several options:

1. Attend any of the Target-Focus Training live training sessions scheduled at various time in locations around the world. Key US training locations include New York City, Dallas, San Diego, Las Vegas, Chicago, Miami and Seattle. Internationally the Group trains in London, Sydney and Hong Kong. Look for information online at:
<http://www.targetfocustraining.com/selfdefenseclasses.html>
2. If you can't make a live session, your next best option is one of the "Live Training in a Box" DVD products. The most popular is the 17-DVD series, "Surviving The Most Critical 5 Seconds of Your Life" and can be found online at:
<http://www.targetfocustraining.com/seminarser11.html>
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