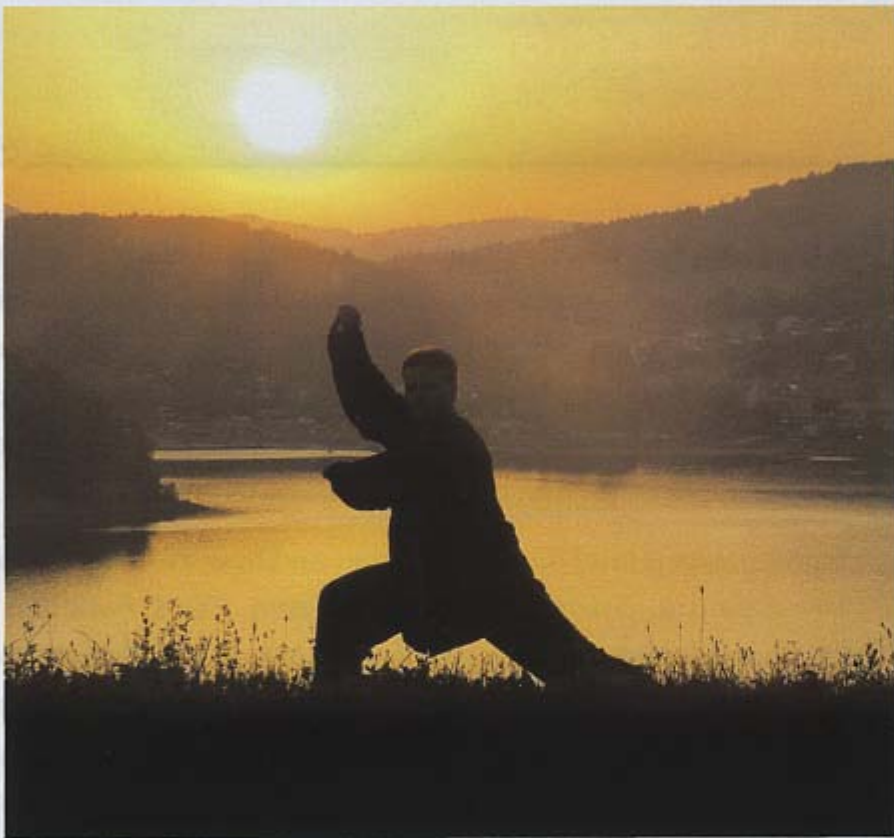


The Training Triangle

Three Sides of an Equilateral Training Program

By Ernest Emerson



I was recently tasked with creating a training program for a new government agency. Working within such an environment forced me to take a different look at designing a program and curriculum that could be taught by any training instructor to students (recruits) who were complete novices to martial combat/defensive tactics. In other words it had to be a program that was repeatable and teachable, so that anyone enrolled in the program gets a known quantity of skills and any individual who inherits the duties of instructor can, without prior experience, produce the same results basically by picking up the manual and start teaching.

It doesn't sound too complicated at first but taking a lifetime of learning, practicing, and teaching, and then distilling it down to a body of information suited to their needs was quite a daunting task.

It forced me to re-evaluate, quantify, and qualify everything that I teach and it gave me some new insights that I will share with you. It has relevance to any form of martial study and can work for hobby martial arts, sport martial arts, or combat martial arts. The principles are valid for novice practitioners, intermediate students, and professional martial artists including teachers.

Now most instructors teach their methods and systems based on some

type of curriculum, generally passed to them by their instructors or systems, but it is always the case that every instructor brings his own insights, discoveries, personality traits, physical interpretations, and personal influences into any teaching environment. However, if you were told you were going to be gone the day after tomorrow what would you spend the next 48 hours writing down to pass on to your students? I will describe briefly what I did in terms of this program but you can plug in your own needs, wants and goals.

The first thing needed was to identify the required results. What skills did these students need to walk away with? In my case the result was the ability to subdue an attacker armed with a weapon of some type, probably an edged weapon but possibly a firearm. In this case survivability of the student was not the primary concern, preventing the bad guy from accomplishing his goal was the priority. Needless to say this was not a self-defense program. Identifying the goals and the environment they were to be used in specified what was included and eliminated things that would not apply.

Next, who are the students? Were they young, old, male, female? Were they in shape athletes or middle-aged professionals taking on a new job assignment? Luckily for me these were all young men (no women) who were in top physical shape. Knowing who the students are again helped refine how and what would be going into the program and at what physical level of activity we would be training at.

There were other factors that came



into play such as how much training time was to be allotted, what level of experience did the students possess, what weapons would be available to them and even such things as their mode of dress. After identifying these parameters the next important aspect was identifying the principles, concepts, and techniques that would be taught. What was I going to teach and how was I going to teach it? Most important of all, would it work? This element brought out something that was absolutely crucial to the success of the curriculum. Would it work for the average man? Here is something that all instructors have to be acutely aware of. It is not whether the techniques will work for you but whether they will work for someone else. If I was 6'4" tall and weighed 245 lbs I could get away with a lot more than if I was 5'7" tall and weighed 145 lbs. What works for you might never work for the average man. The average man, in this case was 5'7" tall and 145 lbs., with an exceptional level of fitness, extreme motivation with an already highly developed warrior ethos. However, these students possessed no previous Hand-to-Hand Combat experience. In order to insure that I was going to cover all of my requirements and theirs, I had to categorize the training into three main categories so that I could be sure that everything meshed and no deficits were left open.

Here is a brief synopsis of the three categories needed to codify the training.

1. Hard Skills Training

This is the nuts and bolts training

phase. This is a punch. This is a kick. In firearms training this is the initial phase where you would teach gun safety, function of the weapon, sight alignment, trigger squeeze, etc. In other words, the basics. This is where I cover how to punch, how to kick (we used two kicks, a foot stomp and a front stomp kick), stance, footwork and body mechanics. Of course there is more, such as takedowns, various strikes, and locks, etc. but you can see where this is at.

2. Soft Skills Training

In essence, when to punch, when to kick. Where to punch, where to kick. When to take down, etc. Now we are starting to apply the hard skills against an opponent under more dynamic conditions. At this point the student needs to learn to work for his technique against an ever increasing non-compliant opponent eventually leading up to an opponent who is progressing from non-compliant to active aggressive actions. In shooting, this would equate to shooting from various positions, behind cover, on the move, low light, and multiple targets, moving targets and good guy/bad guy targeting, (the introduction to shoot-no shoot training). This is where you apply the mechanics of hard skills training to non-static dynamic environments. This also equates in terms of a sports analogy, to a scrimmage before the big game. You are trying your plays against an opposing team, but it's not for real yet. If it doesn't work you get to try again.

3. Active Mental Training

After you have acquired the Hard Skills and are familiar with their use and applications, it really boils down to decision making under stress. I have always stated the following in every class I have ever taught. "You never want to experience something for the first time - in combat." This is the phase where you practice your skills in as close to the actual environment, where they will be used, as possible. In terms of firearms training this is usually called Force-on-Force. If you were a member of an assault team, this is where you would practice dynamic room entry and hostage rescue against live opponents who are shooting back (simunitions or airsoft weapons). In this kind of training, high stress, noise, spontaneous actions of the opponents and fear, you will begin immediately to see the difference between what you can do and what you want to do. It may be a wide gap at first but it narrows considerably as you practice more and more under these realistic conditions. Mistakes will be made. But, this is where you want the mistakes to be made. This is where you get the do-over chance, until you get it wired.

In terms of martial arts training for whatever your purpose, at least some aspect of your training should reflect the conditions (as real as possible) for the arena where you will use these skills. It is important that you realize these three phases of training are not separate or segregated from each other. They overlap, overlay and sometimes occur simultaneously in training. But, for the purpose of discussing them here, they appear separate. In reality they are not. Be it sport, hobby or combat, these three phases of training apply across the board. Just take the aspects that can benefit your end goals and apply them as you need. It is important though to know, really know, that you only get out of your training what you are willing to put into it. My training motto is: Train like a Madman . . . Fight like a Demon.

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