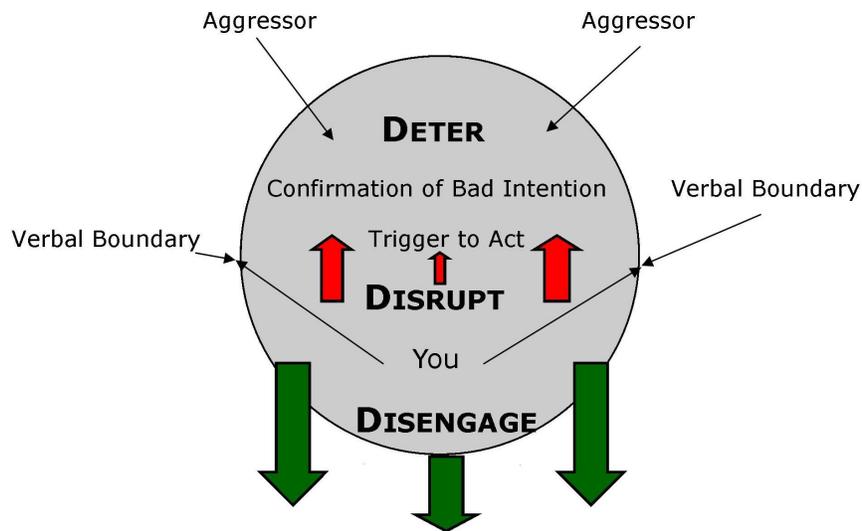


The ACT Conflict Circle

A Model for Deterring and Disengaging from Dangerous People



In respect to the of the *5D's of Self-Defense*, in order to begin the actions of DISRUPT you need three elements:

Action (a pre-mediated/pre-determined action or plan you intend to execute)

Confirmation of Bad Intention (you have determined the person intends to do harm)

Trigger to Act (the event that causes you to act on your action or plan)

Without an action or plan, you have nothing to act upon.

Without *Confirmation of Bad Intention*, you have no reason to act.

Without a *Trigger to Act*, you will not initiate the act.

* *Confirmation of Bad Intention* - The realization that a person has malicious intentions and plans to do you harm.

* *Trigger to Act* – The event that propels you into decisive action to disrupt and disengage from your aggressor.

Much of the actions of **DETER** are intended to prevent and repel aggression. But they also build readiness for immediate action by priming your body with adrenaline. The use of verbal boundary setting will inject your body with a surge of adrenaline in preparation for fight and flight.

If your aggressor penetrates your verbal boundaries, you have been provided with *Confirmation of Bad Intention*. It is this confirmation that will enable you to execute the actions of **DISRUPTING** your attacker with complete conviction and commitment.

But it is the *Trigger to Act* that causes you to explode into action. The *Trigger to Act* is the result of the combination of *Confirmation of Bad Intention* and an event that threatens you with immediate harm. The *Trigger to Act* defines the end of **DETER** and the beginning of methods of **DISRUPT**.

The purpose of the *ACT Conflict Circle* is to provide a model that enables people to process the events that happen during the moments of violent interpersonal conflict.

Using broad definitions:

DETER is “anything you do to influence another not to physically attack you.”

DISRUPT is “anything you do that interrupts and interferes with a physical attack.”

DISENGAGE is “anything you do that either causes a physical separation between you and the attacker or terminates the attack.”

Confirmation of Bad Intention is the event that signals the beginning of conflict and the escalation of **DETER**.

The *Trigger to Attack* is the event that signals that your efforts to **DETER** must be replaced with **DISRUPT**.

The *Opportunity to Escape* is the event that signals that your efforts of **DISRUPT** must be replaced by **DISENGAGE**.

Regardless of the type or origin of the techniques employed, it is the existence of these elements that defines a self-defense situation and differentiates it from an ego fight, sparring match, or any other type of mutual combat.

The importance of these elements cannot be overstated. For example:

Not using **DETER** allows the attack to happen unimpeded and without mental and physical readiness.

Not obtaining *Confirmation of Bad Intention* leaves you uncertain and without moral conviction.

Not responding to the *Trigger to Act* leaves you at a tactical disadvantage. You are now defending not attacking.

Not taking advantage of the *Opportunity to Escape*, means continuing to **DISRUPT** when you could have **DISENGAGED**.

Conversely, **DISRUPTING** prior to the *Trigger to Attack* causes potentially unnecessary violence and an opening for a lawsuit.

DISRUPTING prior to *Confirmation of Bad Intention* most likely will lead to criminal charges filed against you.

DISENGAGING prior to the *Opportunity to Escape* allows the attacker the chance to “get your back”.

Regardless of your personal fighting style, whether or not you carry a weapon, the *ACT Conflict Circle* will help you to better comprehend, convey, and carryout your self-defense, combatives, and martial arts training. Not only will you be able to incorporate it into your own system, you will be better able to explain your system to others using the specific terminology provided.

The *ACT Conflict Circle* is a model that diagrams and defines the concepts that all good self-defense instructors already teach.

THE ACT Conflict Circle: A Case Study

BOSTON -- A woman was attacked just steps from her North End home on Saturday morning.

Boston Police said the 28-year-old was smoking outside of her Salem Street building after 2 a.m. when the suspect asked for a light. Police said he wanted much more than that.

"He pushed her down on the ground and started strangling her," said Tricia, the victim's roommate.

A man approached her on Salem Street. They chatted for a few minutes, and the woman decided to go back inside. "She started to head back in the building, and he said 'I'm coming with you,' and she said, 'No you're not,'" said Tricia. Tricia said he threw her roommate to the ground and started to choke her. "After he was strangling her, she bit him on both arms and kneed him and he took off," said Tricia.

This assault exemplifies all the elements of the ACT Conflict Circle and it illustrates the importance of executing each element purposely in a timely manner.

1. *The victim is smoking outside at 2 am.* At this point she should be executing the concepts of DETER in order to repel unwanted aggression.
2. *A man approached her and asked for a light. They chatted for a few minutes.* This interaction shows that woman is unaware of the potential danger. Because she has not obtained *Confirmation of Bad Intention* through the use of proactive boundary setting, she talks to a would-be rapist.
3. *She started to head back in the building, and he said 'I'm coming with you'.* The statement by the man is both "*Confirmation of Bad Intention and the Trigger to Act*". The problem now is that the victim is caught by surprise and is mentally and physically unprepared.
4. The statement "No you're not" is an attempt to DETER using verbal boundary setting, but it has come too late. The existence of *Confirmation of Bad Intention* and the *Trigger to Act*, necessitates a physical action of DISRUPT to stop the attacker's plan.
5. *He threw her to the ground and started to choke her.* The attacker has both surprise and a physical advantage on his side. This action is part of his plan. For the victim, this action served as her *Trigger to Act*. As a tactical matter, responding to this 2nd *Trigger to Act* was responding too late. She has already been thrown to the ground and is now at an extreme disadvantage.
6. *She bit him on both arms and kneed him.* The victim is now executing the actions of DISRUPT with the intention to cause pain and injure her attacker. In this case, she is executing untrained natural fighting techniques that are effective under the circumstances.
7. "*He took off*". This action by the man is both the *Opportunity to Escape* and DISENGAGE. The actions of DISRUPT have terminated the assault and created DISENGAGE.

This above incident has displayed all the elements of the ACT Conflict Circle. It is clearly an incident of self-defense. But the important lesson to learn is that the victim was always responding a little too late. She was not pro-actively executing the elements as part of a pre-meditated self-defense plan. In her case she was fortunately not dealing with a *highly motivated attacker*. Had her attacker been highly motivated, it is quite possible that he would have disregarded her bites and knee strike, overwhelmed her, and completed his assault.

The Case Study: My interpretation

This section takes a closer look into the psychology of the attacker and victim in the preceding case study.

1. *The victim is smoking outside at 2 am.* At this point she should be executing the concepts of DETER in order to repel unwanted aggression.

It is too easy to judge the victim and determine that she should not be out smoking at 2 a.m. What can be said is that if she chooses to be smoking on her door step at 2 a.m., she should be highly alert. She should be aware of the fact that she is a potential target for attack. Her emotional state should make her feel the need to be “protective of herself”. She should convey the demeanor of not being a easy victim. She should have a plan on how to deal with unwanted attention and aggression.

2. *A man approached her and asked for a light. They chatted for a few minutes.*

Again we could judge and invoke the “Don’t talk to strangers rule”. But this rule does not take into consideration real social interactions. It could have been that this man turned out to be “the love of her life” and that they “lived happily ever after”. It may not be probable, but it is possible. Therefore, the situation is characterized by uncertainty.

3. *She started to head back in the building.*

Most likely, at this point the woman’s intuition told her that “it is time to leave”. She was not comfortable with the situation and she chose to leave. This is a completely valid response in a “social situation” governed by social rules. The problem here is that *attackers by definition do not follow social rules*. Therefore, the attacker saw the woman’s leaving as his *Trigger to Attack*.

What I would have liked to have happened here is active boundary setting by the woman. That she used her voice to insure that the man did not come too close and that she was able to convey a “don’t mess with me” demeanor. And by doing so, she would have realized that the man was not to be trusted thus providing her with *Confirmation of Bad Intention*.

4. *“I’m coming with you”.*

This statement by the attacker serves to both shock the victim with it’s implication and spur the attacker into action. It’s like saying “Geronimo” before jumping from a high place or “Bonsai” before attacking.

“No you’re not”. This statement by the woman shows that she is still following social rules and expects a social response. She doesn’t realize that the man has no intention of adhering to social rules. What I would like to have occurred here is:

NO YOU’RE NOT!! BACK OFF!!! GET THE HELL AWAY FROM ME!!! \$%^&, ETC!

And if necessary, followed by an explosive strike/push designed to create space and allow her the opportunity to get away. Based upon hindsight, we already know that the man is NOT highly motivated. Therefore, it is quite likely that these actions would have been enough to DISRUPT the attacker and cause him to DISENGAGE.

Had this happened, the woman would never have had to experience being thrown to the ground and strangled in an attempted sexual assault. This experience is highly traumatic and will effect the woman in some manner for the rest of her life.

Differentiating from *Confirmation of Bad Intention* and the *Trigger to Act*

Confirmation of Bad Intention is a term used to describe a realization by you that someone intends to do you harm. This realization can come in many forms. Some examples are:

Your intuition tells you that someone is dangerous.

As a result of another person's actions.

As a result of another person's failure to respect your boundaries.

As a result of another person's words or demeanor.

Any other sign that indicates that another person intends you harm if given the opportunity.

Confirmation of Bad Intention (CBI) involves a definite change in your perception of another person(s) and the situation. It is both *an acknowledgement of danger* and it provides you with the *conviction* you need to escalate your methods of deterrence.

The importance of these two elements cannot be overstated. If you acknowledge danger than you (A) cannot be taken by surprise. If you have conviction, you are (B) able to act without reservation and with full commitment. Therefore, your actions will be pre-mediated and have maximum effectiveness.

In contrast, you are at your weakest when you are taken by surprise and you hesitate due to mental uncertainty. This is the situation the attacker wants you to be in.

The CBI is not necessarily a *Trigger to Act* (T2A) because a person may have bad intent but may be unable to harm you. For example, a man who is physically restrained and unable to reach you may create CBI, but that doesn't mean you should be triggered to immediately disrupt him.

The T2A is the signal that causes you to explode into action. The point is to take your aggressor by surprise by the suddenness and force of your action. You are now *attacking the attacker*. Therefore, the T2A is reserved for initiating a violent physical defense.

What this means is that the sooner you are able to determine CBI. The more likely you are to deter the aggressor by using other than violent means. The idea is that the CBI causes you to escalate your methods of deterrence in order to actively prevent the need for the T2A. One example would be using *physical assertiveness* by combining your voice and strong body language to repel further aggression.

The T2A is the point of "no return". You have launched your physical defense and there is no going back. The T2A is signaled when the aggressor breaks your verbal boundary or provides you with any type of cue that he is about to attack. The T2A is a pre-emptive action designed to put you on the offensive as opposed to the defensive.

When the CBI comes at the same time as the T2A you have just been "surprised". This is the point where most people incorrectly think self-defense starts. As a practical matter, it is too late. You are at your weakest both mentally and physically. You have not had the opportunity to build mental conviction and physical readiness.

Therefore, awareness alone is not enough. You may be aware of the person in front of you, but if you have not determined or acknowledged the presence of danger, then you have no CBI. This means that you are now vulnerable to a surprise attack. In contrast, awareness combined with CBI puts you into a heightened state. You are actively warding off danger and looking for the T2A that will send you into a violent physical defense.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

Scenario #1: *You are interacting with someone and he reaches out toward you.*

Here is the problem. There is not enough information to determine what is really going on. If in hindsight the person attacked you, then his act of reaching out was the T2A. But if he did not then it wasn't the T2A. The person could be your best friend and might have been shoeing a fly away. The person could be a serial killer about to make you his next victim. It is impossible to tell from the information provided.

Scenario #2: *You are interacting with someone. You have CBI and he reaches out toward you.*

The act of reaching out is the T2A. Regardless of whether in hindsight the person would or would not have attacked you. The person had the opportunity to attack and you had CBI. That is enough. Many people have been killed by their "best friend" (think of domestic violence). Therefore, the act of reaching out was the T2A because you have CBI.

Scenario #3: *You are interacting with someone and get a definite "creepy feeling".*

The creepy feeling is CBI. In this case, you should immediately escalate your deterrence and use strong verbal and physical boundary setting. You should look to exit the situation. Penetration of your boundary is your T2A.

Scenario #4: *You are interacting with someone and suddenly attacked from the rear.*

You have both CBI and T2A. You must overcome your initial shock and surprise and use your pre-determined mindset of survival to violently attack the attackers.

Scenario #5: *You see someone you would like to avoid. You avoid him or her.*

You have not received either CBI nor T2A. You have used the concept of deterrence to pro-actively avoid potential danger.

Scenario #6: *You are approached by someone who appears to be carrying a weapon. You immediately flee to an area of safety.*

You have simultaneously received both CBI and T2A. In this case, running away served as a Deterrent and a Disengagement. Because of your awareness, there was no need to use a Disruption to create the *Opportunity to Escape*.