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TEN PRINCIPLES TO PREVAIL IN LOW-LIGHT COMBAT



IN ANY KIND OF TRAINING,
YOU CAN IGNORE A SPECIFIC
TACTIC OR FORGET A
PARTICULAR PROCEDURE,
BUT YOU'D BETTER NOT
VIOLATE PRINCIPLES.

BY FOCUSING ON PRINCIPLES rather than tactics or techniques, training becomes a matter of *understanding* how to solve problems instead of merely memorizing a whole raft of task-specific “solutions” that are dependent on perfect execution of the memorized tactic or technique. Principles apply across the board no matter what the circumstance or situation, whereas tactics and techniques are specific.

Additionally, by relying on principles, I can create a specific tactical situation and then set up force-on-force drills to create not just one but a number of possible solutions. The idea behind principle-based training is to find out what works best no matter the circumstances. There are five phases of principle-based training:

1. **Identify a given tactical problem**
2. **Set up a drill to simulate the problem and target the skill set you wish to improve**
3. **Perform the drill as the good guy**
4. **Perform the drill as the bad guy**
5. **Video debrief the results**

Many times the students come up with better solutions than me. We all see problems differently. Through the use of principle-based training, we allow the team to come up with much more creative solutions because we have more minds working on the problem. Force-on-force beat-downs help motivate the creative process, too. These are the 10 primary principles in low-light combatives.



PRINCIPLE

1

➔ Read the Light

You really need to be “boots on the ground” to grasp the concept of read the light. I’ve found you have to perform heavy force-on-force drills to make this principle sink in. You won’t learn this ability to judge lighting conditions in a class room.

But it must be done. The first things to consider when you evaluate a battle space you are going to be moving through are the light levels and how they affect which routes might be best. If you apply the principle of “Move to the Lowest Level of Light,” you can easily pick the best routes. I constantly read the light whether it’s day or night, indoors or outside, in a ship or in the woods.

A lot of people think gaining the high ground is the best tactical position, but this can be the wrong move if the light is wrong and you are silhouetted. Case in point: if you run a four-on-four drill where the light is really bad for one team and good for the other team, you will see that the success rate is very high when the team goes in the direction where the “light is right.”

When the light is right, the team with that advantage will destroy the other team. It’s great watching them high-five each other, thinking, “Yeah, we’re bad.” All right, change sides.

Now the same teams go in opposite directions over exactly the same terrain, but now the high-fiving team gets totally whacked by the other team. The light is not right. It has nothing to do with their skills.

Another important concept to factor in is how long you will be in a given spot. The light might be perfect in the morning but terrible in the afternoon. You have to figure the track of the sun and how the light levels change as the sun moves across the sky.

Reading the light has to be constantly considered— even in broad daylight. If you approach a structure in the daylight, your depth of field is greatly reduced, so you cannot see deeply into windows or doors. This is a nightmare! Your tactics have to consider how to move over that ground with total stealth and have cover-teams on the flanks to cross-angle the dark holes. When the light is not right, avoid that situation or get out of there quickly.



PRINCIPLE 2

→ All Dark Holes Have Guns

I've been shot, sprayed, hosed, and pounded a thousand times by heartless little bastards that hide in the most obscure places. The places are invariably dark, and these treacherous back-shooters nail me through a crack in a door or a little hole in the wall or some other deviant place.

When bad guys are hiding, they're not thinking of fighting fair, especially when you're the bad guy! You will find a dark hole, and you will giggle as you prepare to snipe your unexpected buddies trickling into your ambush. You need to learn to spot the dark holes— then light them up and move!



PRINCIPLE 3

→ See From Aggressor's Point-of-View

Understanding the situation from the bad guy's point-of-view is very important when you're searching and/or engaging threats. This is a singular benefit of force-on-force training because you role-play as the bad guy in several scenarios.

When you can think like the bad guy, you can understand what he will try to do to beat you. You also learn what works for— and against— you.

You try to set up the good guys by making them go through an area that is backlit, or engaging the team two rooms deep from a dark hole. If you look at a room layout and have to think, "How would I hide in here?," your perspective changes.

In larger arenas, this principle is even more important because you have more options. When the point of discovery is made, you have to immediately understand your relationship to the threat— the "orient" in the OODA Loop— in order to determine your next move.

In milliseconds I need to understand what he looks like to me, what I look like to him, and how my team is orientated to the threat. Here is that moment when the crap hits the fan and Murphy likes to take charge. If you can act decisively here, you can harness the momentum and put the threat on his heels.

PRINCIPLE 4

➔ Move to the Lowest Level of Light

When you move through a battle space, you must constantly read the light levels (Principle 1). You can determine a good tactical route by following the lowest levels of light. This really is important in wooded terrains or in areas that have dark, contrasting shadows. Indoors, you are always clearing the dark areas first, and those are usually good places to move toward.

PRINCIPLE 5

➔ Light & Move

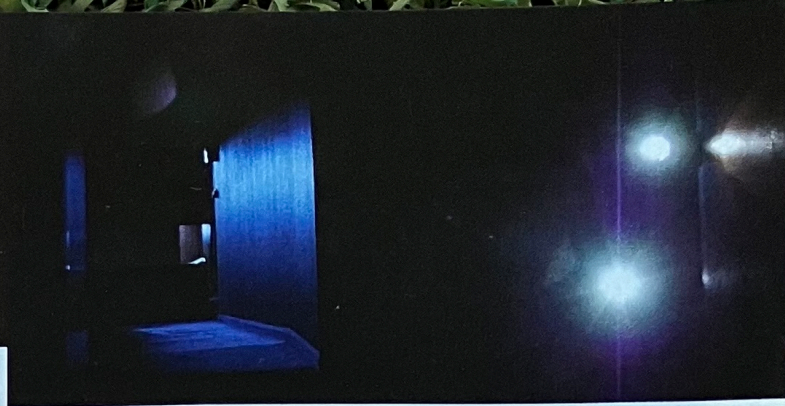
In very dark environments, turning on your flashlight also lets the bad guy know where you are. If you want to keep the light on, great ... for the bad guy! Because then he can follow your movement through the area. Therefore, you want to light an area with a momentary-on beam, then get out of Dodge! Move rapidly to a new spot that is unpredictable (from your opponent's perspective).

More often than not, it's not the guy in front of you who will most likely engage you; it will be from outside your light's beam direction. If you pass

a bad guy, your frontal light beam becomes your own backlight, and you can be easily engaged from the rear.

The best method is to quickly flash the light—and then move. The skill set you must harness is to be able to clearly understand what you just saw in that quick flash of light. Learn to read pieces of the combat geometry in that split second of flashing light. That's what will determine the direction and the distance you move.

PRINCIPLE 6



➔ Intermittent Light

Imagine you're in a pitch-black environment and you see a light flash to your left. Danger! You immediately index yourself to that unexpected light. Then you see a flash of light moving to your right and you reposition. Then another light shines over the top of you and yet another strobes again, farther to your left. The flashing lights are seemingly everywhere at once.

You're completely disoriented; you don't know how many are coming at you or exactly where they're coming from. As a bad guy, I've been in this position many times. When the students get it right, my odds of winning go way down.

The intermittent use of light can be employed by a solo person because the threat only knows where you are when you flash your light—the threat doesn't know how many people are there. By changing direction when you move in the darkness—"Light and Move," another principle—you're never where the bad guy just saw the flash.

For this reason, you need a flashlight with a momentary-on tailcap switch. One reason SureFire invented the lockout momentary-on tailcap was for this exact purpose—to strobe the light on and off unpredictably.

Your light deceives the threat. By changing the height from which you

flash the light, and the direction you point the light, it is impossible for a threat to guess where you are.

Every time you flash the light, you're getting lots of information. You will "Paint the Path" (another principle) to see which area is clear or what cover might be available. When a team harnesses the use of intermittent light, they read off of each other's light. If, for example, a four-man team is clearing a large warehouse, one man might flash his light from the left side of the warehouse, but every man on the team reads that light and interprets the information revealed by the flash.

Then, say a flash of light from the right shoots across the room and lets the team know what that piece of geometry looks like. They intermittently pick apart the room piece by piece while the flashing light lets each team member know where everyone is and where everyone is moving.

If your bad guy looks up, all he sees is a room full of fireflies. It makes no sense, random flashes of light. Yet, for the team members, every flash gives up lots of information. The more you fight it out in this type of scenario, and you learn that darkness is your friend, your odds of winning the gunfight go way up.



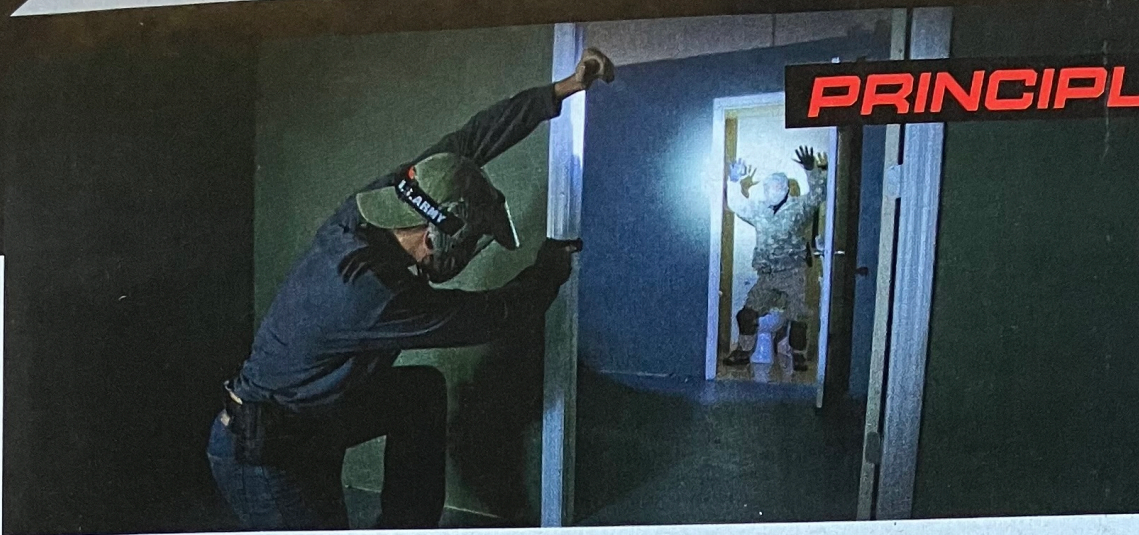
PRINCIPLE 7

➔ Never Backlight Yourself

Skylining, or backlighting, is a very bad thing if it illuminates your silhouette for anyone to easily see. Simply being aware of the danger is the main thing, but you must also Read the Light (Principle 1) in order to avoid backlighting.

On the other hand, backlighting can work against the bad guy as well. Situational awareness can lend you an advantage.

The worst backlighting is when your own team member(s) creates a backlighting situation by accident or through lack of experience. For this reason, well-designed weapon-mounted lights should come with a disable switch to prevent white-light accidental discharges.



PRINCIPLE

8

➔ Power with Light

Powering with light is used when there is bright light behind you and the direction you're looking is much darker than that area. Generally, this makes it hard for you to see a threat hiding in the shadows. This is when the brightest light you can use really pays off. Think of looking into a barn from the outside, on a sunny afternoon. Anyone in the dark areas inside the barn is going to easily see you, but you will not be able to see them. This situation greatly reduces your chance of winning a gun battle.

You can power with light when you have located a specific point where the threat is hiding. If he sticks anything out, you will see it immediately, and he will be blinded by your light if he tries to see where you are. Powering a bright light into someone's eyes works very well in less-lethal situations as well, because temporarily blinding the threat allows you to better control the situation. It can also allow your partner to move on the threat, and the threat won't be able to see your partner move.

PRINCIPLE

9



➔ Breath and Relax

This principle is easier said than done. I believe it takes a lot of real-world experience to get a handle on and appreciate the idea that you're more effective if you're calm and cool when everyone else is dropping a load. Perhaps the single most important character trait of a special forces operator is the ability to remain calm during utter chaos. This is a constant objective in my force-on-force training.

I really try to rattle the students and watch the wheels come off. It's real simple— set up a drill with a few dastardly bad guys, call Murphy's Law Office, then call the drill "hot" and enjoy the carnage. You learn things like, "No one understands me when I scream two octaves higher!" or that "dive and roll thing" only works in the movies.

Whatever the mistakes may be, they are priceless jewels to use when you tell the students, because of your vast knowledge, to just "breathe and relax."

PRINCIPLE 10

➔ Paint Your Path

Embedded in this concept are two other principles—"Momentary Use of Light" and "Light & Move." During the split-second flash of light after you momentarily activate your flashlight, you must take a good look at what's in the beam. Two automatic visual reads I always take with this brief flash-sight picture are (1) the direction of my movement and (2) the condition of the pathway I will be taking. Are there obstacles? Stairs? Debris? Hazards?

You can practice and get very good at learning how to paint your path with light during a momentary flash of light. Simply darken a space and then take soft things, such as pillows or couch cushions, and throw them into the darkness. Rapidly trigger your flashlight and move through the room—without touching anything. By doing such, you are learning to read the combat geometry and "paint your path" for your upcoming movements in milliseconds of time. Footwork in the darkness is critical. You can really hurt yourself, and your odds of a successful mission, if you trip in a pitch-black environment.

