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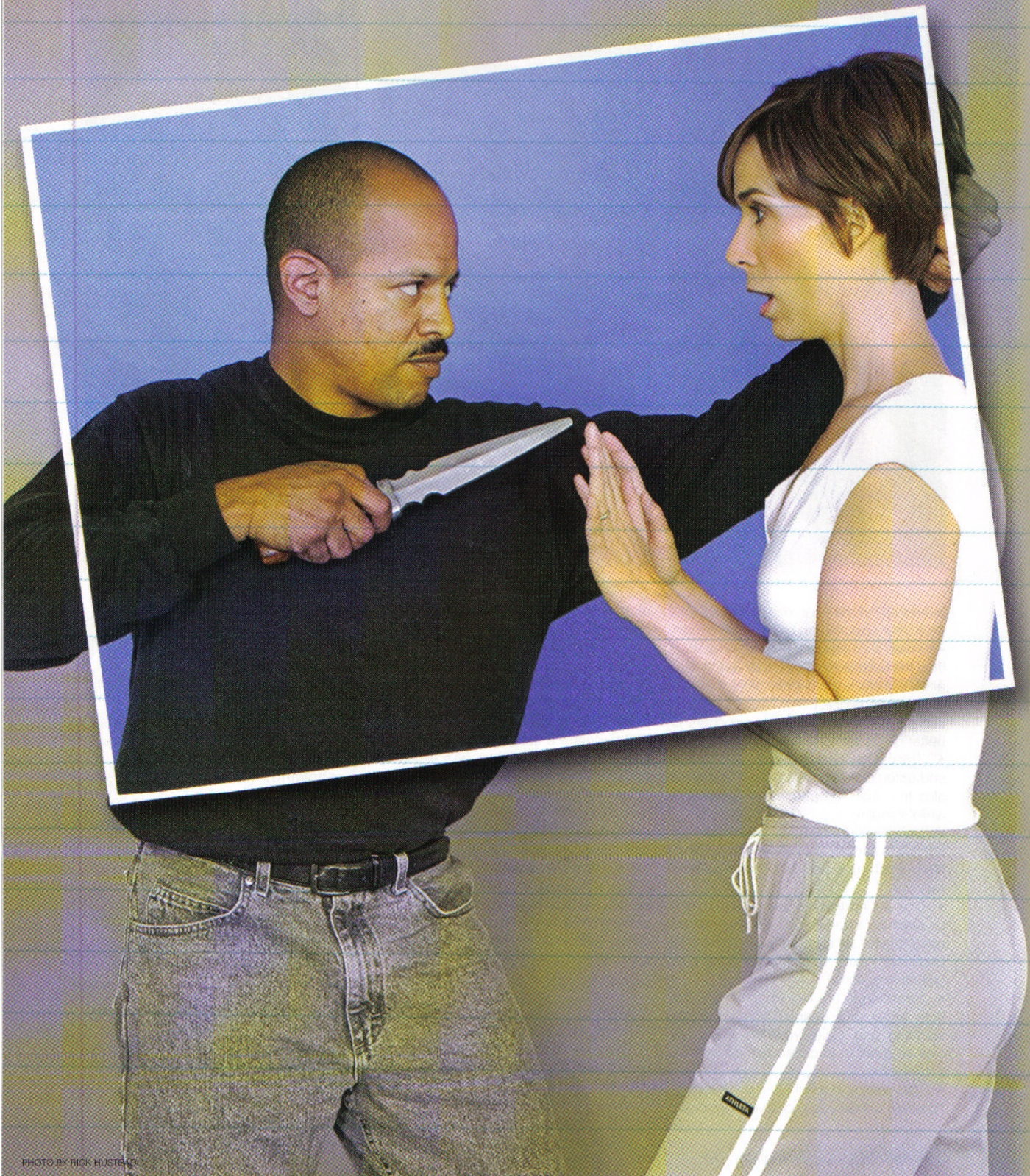
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CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The Art of Using Words to Defuse Aggression Part 1

by Michael Lizarraga

When facing a violent conflict, a true martial artist chooses flight over fight. He knows that the art of fighting without fighting is preferable to smashing noses and breaking arms—and the lawsuits that almost always follow. But if you're cornered, if you're in a profession that forces you to fight, if you're responsible for protecting another person, sometimes you need to get a little rough.

Few martial artists know that there's a third course of action, a way to manage aggressive behavior using words. When fleeing isn't an option, verbal de-escalation can offer you a way out.

It's Not About You

"There are two main types of aggressors," says Doc Elliot, a law-enforcement/psychiatric-ward negotiator and a martial artist since the age of 12. "Those who never learn how to communicate their anger and frustration except through yelling, throwing things, punching walls or punching people; and those with symptoms of an illness or deficiency. However, any of us can respond with anger or aggression—it's in our genes. It's usually when we're older, wiser and tired of conflict that we search for other ways to resolve or avoid confrontations."

"If you want to de-escalate a situation using 'talking tactics,' you



Instrumental, or attention-based, behavior involves superficial demands and recognizable objects that can benefit the aggressor, Doc Elliot says. A weapon may or may not be involved.

should first seek a de-escalation of self, an unlearning of your violent behavior effected by convincing yourself that the confrontation isn't about you," says Elliot, who's professional duties have seen him manage the mentally ill as well as prevent buildings from being blown up.

"It's rarely ever about you," he says. "It's not about you cutting him off on the freeway, in the bank line or in a conversation. It's not about his clenched fists, raised knife or loaded gun. In most cases, there's something behind the aggressor's behavior that drives it toward you, and it's here [that] you need to focus to find out what the person needs to effectively de-escalate the problem. It's in this not-about-you mind-set that reasoning with a hostile person can begin, identifying and understanding his responses from a psychological standpoint and reacting appropriately."

You should be aware of two types of aggressive behavior, he says: instrumental (attention-based) and expressive (emotional-needs-based). Instrumental behavior involves superficial demands and recognizable objects that, if obtained, are beneficial to the aggressor. It includes throwing things, yelling, cutting oneself and so on. Expressive behavior communicates the emotional needs that drive the attention-based behaviors—frustration, outrage, passion, despair and anger.

When you use defusing tactics so you can deal with what's behind a person's expressive behavior, he'll no longer need to exhibit instrumental behavior.

"Most violent individuals don't really want to hurt you," says Elliot, who's studied *taekwondo*, *aikido* and kung fu *san soo*. "This behavior is the only way some aggressors know how to say, 'I'm scared,' 'I'm mad,' 'I'm suicidal' or 'You need to do what I say now,' acquiring your immediate attention. Keep in mind that although they might not always get it, most aggressors want an 'out.' The key is not to absorb the behavior as a personal attack but to show the individual that you're trying to help him."

Manipulating the Monster

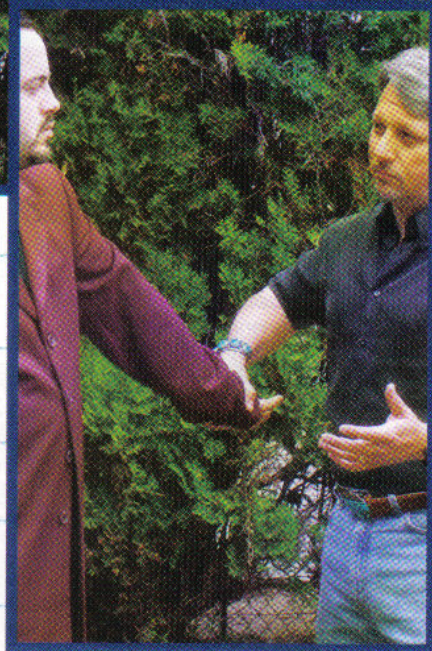
The reality, of course, is that most aggressors will shun any type of reasoning that takes place in the moment. Therefore, before examining Elliot's de-escalation tactics for conversation-friendly conflicts, it's good to look at the more volatile ones and a basic strategy for them, which he calls "redirection/distraction."

Scenario: An oversize gangbanger bursts into an emergency room with his sick mother by his side, demanding that she be looked at. When he's told there will be a four-hour wait, he begins to cause a ruckus. Nurses and guards pour into the

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Doc Elliot's "talking tactics" offer a viable alternative to getting physical at the initial stage of a conflict.



foyer and order him to stop. He refuses, then becomes more infuriated and begins threatening the staff. Finally, a doctor intervenes.

"I've just called the police," he says, a little panicky.

"Oh yeah?" the man replies. "Well, they're not here now, so until they are, you're mine!"

Suddenly, a petite, elderly nurse enters the lobby at a snail's pace, straightening her glasses and gently saying to the thug, "Young man, young man ... do you really want to act this way in front of your mother?"

After a lengthy pause, the man speaks: "Lucky for you my mother's with me." Looking confused and embarrassed, he walks out.

In this true story, the little old woman ended the chaos with one simple sentence that employed redirection/distraction.

"Whether angry, psychotic or desperate, anyone coming after you has a focus," Elliot says. "This focus, however, can easily be [diverted] by another. This is called 'fracture of focus' or 'conflict of focus,' a method that can break, redirect or lessen an attacker's focus. It forces him to focus on two or more things, therefore manipulating the situation."

While the entire ER staff was fixated on the man's behavior, feeding and fueling his

craving for attention, the woman created a conflict of focus by redirecting a large part of his attention onto his mother. The maneuver produced doubt about whether he should continue his actions.

Solve vs. Control

Other circumstances may elicit more conversation between you and the aggressor, allowing insights into his expressive behavior that will permit you to de-escalate his instrumental behavior. This process, Elliot explains, encompasses two steps:

- **Step One** Initiate a dialogue with the aggressor, in which real communication takes place in lieu of a power struggle.
- **Step Two** Find out what he needs and thereby discover what will potentially solve the crisis.

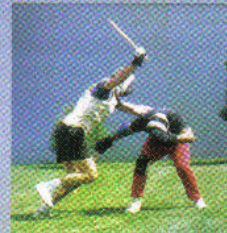
Active listening plays an essential role in these steps. "Despite the popular no-

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him identify the feelings that are driving his behavior and tap into its root. It might even remove his need for attention-based behavior.

Paraphrasing

This technique entails repeating what the opponent is trying to communicate, or at least stating the key concepts of the situation.

For example, he might be focusing on what he's losing with statements like: "My wife left me over my drug use, and I'll probably lose my job over it! My friends have kicked me out of their lives, and I have no family to turn to. Shooting you sounds pretty good right now!"

Try to show your attention by paraphrasing his words: "OK, so you believe your wife has left you. You might have lost your job, and you feel like you don't have anyone to turn to, so you feel that violence is a good option at the moment. I think I understand."

Your responses should always be from the standpoint of an impartial observer, looking at the situation from the outside and guiding the aggressor from a hopeless and final perspective to one with a

tion—that listening is a passive behavior, abundant clinical evidence and research suggest that active listening is an effective way to induce behavioral change in others," Elliot says. "When truly listened to, individuals tend to listen to themselves more carefully and evaluate and clarify their own thoughts and feelings.

"In addition, they tend to become better problem solvers, growing less defensive and oppositional and more accepting of other points of view. Remember that most aggressors are seeking an out and, if met with an empathetic ear, can become less fearful of being criticized and more inclined to realistically appraise their own position."

The following techniques, compiled by Elliot and other experts, form the core elements of the active-listening approach.

Emotional Labeling

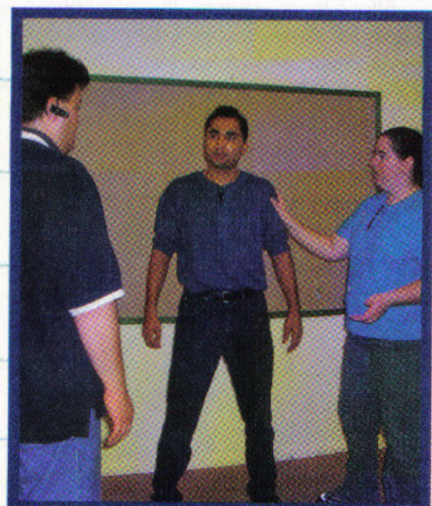
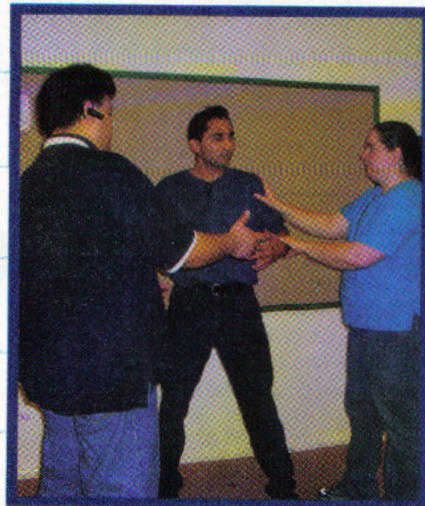
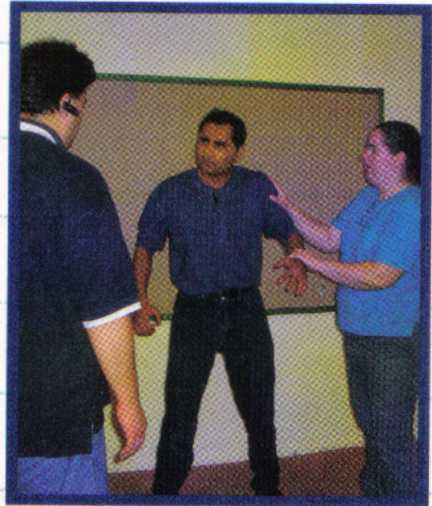
When a person is in a crisis and reacting primarily from emotions, you need to tap into the emotional dimensions driving his behavior toward you or whoever is the focus of the outburst. Remember that something is fueling the behavior and, therefore, that he needs to see the situation from your point of view. Emotional labeling allows you to help him understand that perspective by attaching a tentative label to the feelings expressed or implied by his words and actions. It also helps to attach an overall emotion in the beginning that he may be feeling about the issue, such as, "This must be very frustrating for you," or "I understand that you must be really angry over this."

The labeling demonstrates that you're paying attention to his emotions and not just to the attention-based behavior, such as the weapon he's holding. That helps



If communication is possible, active listening can help a martial artist de-escalate a conflict. Recommended tactics include using minimal encouragement, paraphrasing and mirroring.

Using "fracture of focus" (aka "conflict of focus"), the focus of the aggressor (center) is broken, redirected or lessened by the strategic use of words.



positive outlook. You convey that by using expressions like "so you believe" and "you might have" instead of "you have." This almost subliminal response exposes him to another perspective and tells him that things might not be so bad. The tactic can be just enough to plant a question in his subconscious about whether he's thinking clearly and making the right decision.

After establishing the overall emotion, you might respond with, "It sounds like you're really angry over your wife leaving you and you're afraid of being fired from your job as a result of what's going on, and it sounds like you want to get your wife's attention by doing this and maybe even make her pay by your actions here today." At this point, he might agree with your point of view, thereby validating the labeling assessments. On the other hand, he might modify or correct the assessment by firing back another version, such as, "Sure I'm angry and scared that I'll be fired, but I don't really want to hurt anyone—I just want my wife back."

Hearing such a change reveals something important about his emotional needs. You can use that as ammunition when figuring out which direction to take the negotiation.

Mirroring

This technique involves repeating only the most important concepts or last few words of the aggressor, proving that you understand what he's trying to get across. Because it's important to establish a non-confrontational presence early on, you must demonstrate that you're trying to better understand his core issues and create a rapport. For instance, he may say, "You can't make me leave here—this is my home!"

You reply, "This is your home—I understand what you're saying."

This method allows him to guide the flow somewhat, instead of placing you in the position of apparent control. With less pressure to arrive at the right response or assessments, you may be better able to develop a partnership with him, allowing him to vent while you gather essential information about where you should focus.

Minimal Encouragement

When using encouragement in a negotiation, your replies should be brief and well-timed. That will enable you to prove that you're listening and understanding what's being said, rather than simply hearing the words. Often, the result will be a

positive response from the aggressor, rather than a shutdown accompanied by the suspicion that you're there simply to accomplish a mission. When acknowledging his statements, use simple responses, such as "All right," "OK" and "I see" to encourage him to continue communicating.

"We need to get in the habit of trying to solve, rather than to instinctively control, a problem," Elliot says. "It nearly always works out better when you do. Most aggressors want an out rather than having to prove that they're tougher than you. The trick is helping them find the out so they believe it's their idea to walk away." ✕

(To be continued in the February 2008 issue.)

About the author:

Michael Lizarraga is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and martial artist. Doc Elliot has worked in the psychiatric field for 25 years. His company, New World Education Resource Network, teaches verbal and psychological de-escalation and negotiation, as well as physical self-defense. For more information, visit www.blackbeltmag.com.

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Details Clip ID: 352 / Size: 6.0M / Duration: 02:47

Category submissions > half guard > knee bar

Title Passing the half guard to knee bar attacks

Description The key to these movements, as Jean Jacques demonstrates, is to move your hips beyond opponent's knees and control your opponent. Use caution with these submissions as they can be easily injured.

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ID	Title	Description	Position	Action	File
SUBMISSIONS					
SUBMISSIONS					
250	Half guard to knee bar	Similar to clip 197, Jean Jacques goes directly for a knee bar instead of the guard pass, but here...	half guard	knee bar	
	Half guard to knee bar	Jean Jacques demonstrates a clever submission control when your opponent is blocking your...	half guard	knee bar	

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