

Martial Arts Training for Bodyguards - Protecting a Third Party

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As an indirect result of the current world situation, I get calls and E-mails on a regular basis from people involved in security. One of the questions frequently asked is "which martial art is the best for use in close protection?"

Before you can answer this question, I think it is important to understand that in security and close protection, the traditional notion of self-defense has little value. In its place, you need to substitute a mindset of ensuring the client's safety before your own. While you may be a 'target' in a confrontation, the attacker views you more as an obstacle than a goal. The real focus of the attack, at least in their minds, is the person you are protecting.

Besides your way of thinking, the other thing that needs to be changed is your 'martial arts' skills set. Traditional martial arts do not, for the most part, teach you how to fight and certainly not how to protect someone else. This is not to say it is not good for health, physical fitness, self-defense, or personal growth. Certainly it is. However, emphasis in most martial arts classes is on forms (kata); drills; controlled application of movements from the forms; etc. While all of these are necessary for the development of a martial artist many of these aspects are of lesser value for someone involved in close protection.

Before I am totally misunderstood or 'hung out to dry' as an iconoclast, let me give you a personal example of what I am talking about an addition to having taught civilian and military bodyguards, I have also had the unique privilege, in the mid-1990's of training with the bodyguard instructors unit of the Chinese wujing. This particular group prepares bodyguards for government work and provides protection services to government officials including the Chinese president.

Unlike the Chinese martial arts we typically see displayed in the west or in the wushu schools in China, the martial arts program for the wujing is taught on two levels. The first level involves basic empty hand (sanda) and armed skills similar to those practiced in other units of the PLA. The second, more advanced level is custom designed for close protection work and derives from both practical experience and an extensive knowledge of 'real' combat. Training focuses on

protecting clients against both single and multiple armed attackers - including those with firearms.

While many martial arts teach handgun disarms, virtually everyone executes disarms against a weapon that is touching some part of the body. (e.g., Pistol to the front or back of the head or; the side and small of the back.) Realistically, this scenario seldom occurs, as a trained attacker would never allow the weapon to contact your body. Close protection training therefore concentrates on engaging and disarming an attacker from a distance of several feet. As well, disarms that immediately redirects the weapons back to the attacker are preferred to those that could degenerate into a wrestling match with the assailant. Poor technique here could result in bystanders (the client; other team members) being fatally shot by accident.

In my opinion there are several key components in practical, realistic martial arts training for close protection.

The first involves stripping techniques down to their bare essentials. You cannot simply teach a traditional martial art in these circumstances and label it (as many do) 'realistic combatives' for close protection. Customized training must be based upon extensive practical experience; a thorough understanding of your role and duties; and how to maximize efficiency in the minimum amount of time.

For example, handcuffing and ground fighting may have its place in law enforcement and other venues but are totally unsuited for situations where you are required to take down and assailant and remove a client from harm. (The issues of liability and excessive force also enter the picture - but are a subject in themselves.)

Another component should emphasize the 'free-fighting' and improvisational ability of the bodyguard. Here, the general framework of a situation is outlined (e.g., moving the client through a crowd to his vehicle) but the specifics of the attack are not. Response to the attack becomes a 'free-style' situation. Given the unrehearsed nature of training in this manner, the likelihood of injury (especially in the case of Chinese military bodyguard trainees) can be quite high. However, such training is vital and serves as a 'wake-up call' to the seriousness of the job.

(The anti-riot police in China also frequently use 'free-style' scenario training. I have personally witnessed female officers removing a 'rioter' from the top of an automobile - a common situation encountered in street altercations with protestors.)

To answer the original question "which martial art is the best for use in close protection?" I would have to say none of them and all of them. While all training has value, this specific art needs to be custom tailored for close protection work. As I said earlier, you need to learn both the appropriate physical skills necessary

to protect someone else and the mindset to overcome your instinct to save yourself first.