

## Hard, Soft, Neutral, Covert

### The 5 Golden Rules to Verbal Communication

Ahhhhh the gentle art of verbal communication/persuasion. When engaging a threat in Verbal persuasion, context and situation is going to dictate my verbal communication strategy be it:

- **Hard:** (Back off !!!, don't come any closer !!!, stop right there !!!) Verbal Demand
- **Soft:** (I'm feeling a little uncomfortable with you being so close) Verbal feedback
- **Neutral:** (Can you just step back a little bit? Why do you have to come so close?) Verbal Question
- **Covert:** (see if you can't just step back a little bit) Verbal question combined with a subconscious challenge

Whatever the communication strategy chosen, one MUST also be congruent with body language exhibited by you as the user. Remember if the voice and body don't match, the threat will usually believe the body.

Hard communication can often evoke a negative challenge by one who is psychologically intent on causing you harm. Often phrases such as back off, don't come any closer, or stop right their, especially as a primary verbal response, can often "precipitate" a physical altercation to take place, an undesirable outcome in my opinion. Having said this, as a police officer (an often situational and context specific job) I will use these phrases as a last chance, save face, opportunity that a subject can comply with before physical force is used to control resistant or assaultive behaviour.

For most (non-law enforcement, non-military, non-security) here at the school, I teach students to use neutral linguistics patterns that can synergize into soft linguistics patterns and when needed, interject a covert linguistic pattern with hard patterns often being a last resort.

Eg:

During a "street interview" when a subject is probing your proximal zones I might say (from a good passive stance), "Wow, I don't know about you, but I am feeling a little uncomfortable, can you just step back a little, or if you want I can just step back" (neutral combined with soft). If I get non-compliance I may move to, "Hey brother, see if you

cannot just step back a little bit for meö (covert). If I still get non-compliance I may now move to. ö I need you to back offö (Hard).

It has been my experience that starting with a hard linguistic pattern only causes the person; especially if it is someone you do not know, to escalate his or her intentions. This is especially true if the subject has friends, as they will want to save face. In other words these hard phrases, when used in street encounters, often don't de-escalate a situation, BUT often escalate one to a physical encounter.

When verbally interacting with a threat, remember that your communication should not in most circumstances:

1. Challenge in a negative way
2. Command your threat to do something
3. Threaten
4. Insinuate that your attacker is wrong
5. Prevent the threat from saving face

These are what I call the ö5 Golden Rules of Verbal Communicationö when attempting to de-escalate a potential aggressor. As always, a physical interdiction can take place at any time no matter what communication strategy used, if you believe the threat is about to physically attack. Often, these communication strategies can cognitively öpattern interruptö the threat, when used appropriately, giving you a tactical advantage when initiating a physical first strike.

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