

## **Grip the hilt and draw the weapon**

### **A training method to support the instant transformation into a fighter**

A fight is not a fight without a hilt being gripped and a weapon being drawn. After that a basic stance may be more or less assumed. The fighter is in a position ready to defend and if necessary to fight back. That's essentially what happens in all sorts of fights.

This observation was the starting point for my idea and why I wanted to add the procedure to our trainings and fighting. However, in time I found more in these movements than a sheer body motion or archaic traditions. I now think the whole idea of gripping your hilt and drawing your weapon is not only to transform yourself physically, but more importantly to mentally prepare yourself as a fighter. This will place you into the right state of body, mind and soul for defence, I think gripping and drawing is essential for our training and I therefore recommend it to you in this article, as follows.

The moment of gripping the hilt and drawing the weapon must be separated into explanation, discussion and many other things that happen during training besides fighting. This moment also separated way back in history from the all day activities of knights, noble or gentlemen to the situation where they for whatever reason had to defend themselves.



Let's have a look at the idea further. The principal is that gripping the hilt and drawing the weapon can help to transform you not only physically but also mentally into a fighter - to get instantly into the right state for a fight. It is supported by at least three concepts which proved their value in other settings; psychology, acting and coaching. It's now only about how we use them for our purpose. Let's see if these three concepts can help to explain what should go on during the hilt gripping and weapon drawing procedure in our training.

## Ringling a bell: conditioning by stimulus

It all started with Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (\*1849, †1936) and his famous experiment on dogs. In 1905 he found out that a conditioned dog hearing only the sound of a ringing bell would water its mouth. To archive this Pavlov went through a regimented training with his dogs by always ringing a bell a moment just before food was given to them. After a while the dog learned that the sound means food. The expectation of food was flooding it's mouth regardless, if there was really food to come or not. He was trained. Conditioned if you speak more frankly.



Now, what has the dog's mouth to do with gripping a hilt and drawing a sword? At least one thing. It is that there are triggers in both environments. For the dog the bell is the trigger, for a fighter there are some more: they are the sound and the sighting of a weapon being drawn. And, if you are the one who draws the weapon, you also feel your hand at the hilt and the little resistance of the scabbard holding the blade back. You also feel your own movement of your body. These are all triggers for you.

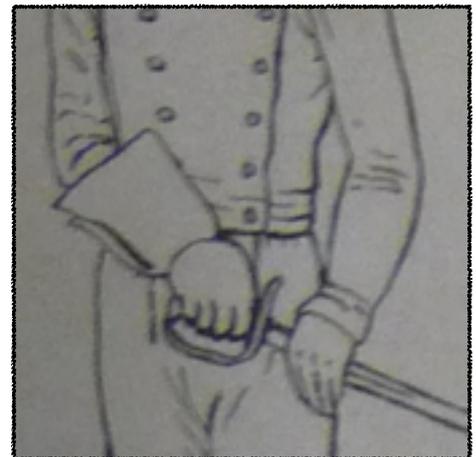
The gripping of a hilt and drawing of a weapon can this way be used as a trigger to turn our current state into a fighters state in a split second like the ringing of a bell turns a lucky dog into a hungry one.

## Learning by gesture: using the mind-body connection

Next the hilt gripping and weapon drawing idea gets further support by another concept. Michael Alexandrowitsch Tschechow (\*1891, †1955) developed in the 1920's the more human appropriate idea of the "Psychological Gesture" for the art of acting. Designed to get his acting students instantly into character, Tschechow took the psychological approach and combined it with a full-bodied gesture. This was because he believed in the mind-body connection. As many martial artists do as well.

Tschechow developed a technique that allows actors to memorise a character by using a single body gesture and then able to show this character immediately on stage or in screen productions.

The essence of the Psychological Gesture is that after the actor has analyzed the character he wants to play, he physically trains using the same characters traits. For example, if the character of the play has an unstable and twisted mind, the actor would perhaps twist his right knee and tumble until he feels as unstable and twisted as he thinks the character is in the play. The actor will therefore use both the physical and the mental side of the character.

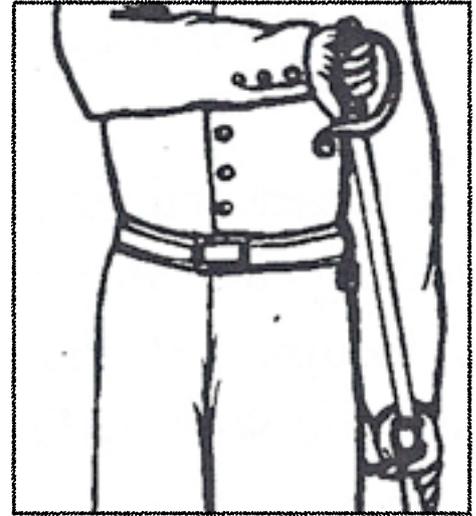


Before getting onto the stage or in front of the camera he will secretly do the gesture and then be right person for the oncoming performance. He is now in the state his character needs to be for him to be authentic.

We could use the same method to develop our training and fighting skills. We could grip our hilt, feel the stabilizing element of it and go into the correct state, just as many good martial art books describe. When we are training we would simply check if this motion physically feels as a fighter should feel. Then we can draw our weapon, and be authentic to win.

## Programming by anchor: reliving situations

The last concept that adds value to the idea of gripping the hilt and drawing the weapon, is the idea of Anchoring. This concept is taken from Neuro-Linguistic Programming and dates back to 1976. This model was developed by Richard Bandler (\*1950) and John Grinder (\*1940). In Neuro-Linguistic Programming, an anchor is a mark set by a sensation of your senses, which were stimulated by an event occurring. This principle of anchoring happens to all of us. For example, the lovely smell of apple pies or cookies brings back the childhood feeling of your mother's kitchen when you smell them again, no matter where or when. Therefore it is the anchor for that particular state you are suddenly in. According to Bandler and Grinder, anchors are set by visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and/or tactile sensations.



Now, what can we do with this knowledge? We can programme ourselves with own anchors. Firstly you must think of a mindset you want and then recall a situation when it happened. Secondly, relive it as intensely as possible by asking yourself what you saw, heard, felt, tasted or smelled. Thirdly, you create the anchor by causing a sensation of your body, like speaking a word out loud. Later, when you need the state you programmed, you recall the model by using the anchor.

For example, you might have seen sportsmen doing ritual like gripping their mascots or performing a dance. That is called from an anchored programme they have stored during their training. It could also be an auditory anchor like a shout of a football team or maybe even the smell of your "winner perfume" - if it is connected to an emotional situation you had and previously programmed. You can recall this situation by using its anchor and then instantly be in the required state.

The concept of anchoring and the idea of gripping hilts and drawing weapons are very similar. Both have a training situation where you programme yourself so that you can recall what you have previously learnt. Both look for triggers that they can use and in our case it would be the tactile moment of gripping the hilt. A memory we might want to relive could be an effortless win or a great victory against a challenging opponent.

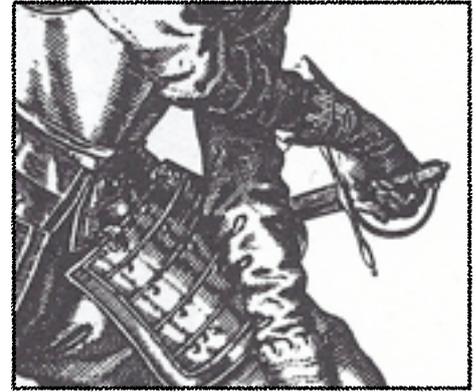
## Gripping and drawing: training the method

To finalize the article let's have a close look at the details for training, and what you as a trainer should take care of. This blends in the ideas from the three concepts above. It's only a single moment when all this should occur in a fight, so I have marked it in the text (Bell! Gesture! Anchor!) to ensure you build the bridge between body and mind in the right moment. That's very important.

Before you do any conditioning, gesturing or anchoring it is imperative that you make sure you know the state you want to enter! Don't use the concept if you have no idea what this state could be. You want to avoid training in something that you are unsure about. This could potentially train you in sloppiness, aggression or similar unwanted states.

Take your time and discuss it in your club. Read more martial art books, practice meditation, recall situations etc. With the intention to find out what would support you best. My suggestion for a successful fencer would be to concentrate on being open, but focused, rooted, but agile and finally calm but bursting with energy. Try to think of a situation where all of this happened. It could take a while so make sure you choose the perfect moment. For me, it was a car accident I was in. But I don't want to go into details, since this is very individual and all of you have to find for yourself.

It is important to prepare your material before you get started. You will need at the very least a simple belt. This is so the weapon is handy at any time and also so that the hands are free for whatever you would need them for in 'non-combat-time'. If you prefer, you can use a scabbard instead. Now the gripping and drawing part is prepared and you are equipped to start the training part of conditioning, gesturing and anchoring.



This is where the mental part of fights start. Think of the trigger that would cause you to fight, the body gesture of gripping the hilt fast, confident and firm. Relive a situation where you were in the state you want as intensively as you can.

Then you actually grip (Bell! Gesture! Anchor!) your hilt. Feel the stabilising body element either to defend yourself or to attack your opponent. At this point you have built the bridge between your body and mind.

This concept ends when you actually draw your weapon and start the fight. Now the fencing starts and considerations about measure, technique and tactic come in as you have learnt in your school or club.

If done correctly in training, it will soon become your trigger for the special mindset you need for any fight you might come into. You will then be able to immediately get into the prepared state you need in this situation.

## Summary

The key elements are the right state and the trigger and that you are precise in your execution and timing. On the specific state you need, it will be different for everybody and you will have to find your own way since I think this is a topic for a book and not a short article like this one. For the trigger however, I would recommend that you make it the gripping of the hilt and drawing of your weapon.

Give it a try it during your next training and let me know if and how it works for you.

Marcus

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