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## ATM Fraud

Remembering a 2007 Tony Blauer self-defense video, four people use acting to devalue themselves as targets and avoid physical confrontations.

By Hilary Achauer and Rick Randolph

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Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

Glory Dawson had finished her waitressing shift and was headed home when she remembered she needed to deposit a check. Dawson went to the ATM, put her card into the machine and saw four men walking toward her.

The men surrounded her.

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"How much money you got in there?" one of them asked.

Dawson immediately felt threatened and froze.

"I didn't turn around, I didn't look at them, I just had this second of, 'Oh my gosh. What do I do? What do I do?'" Dawson said.

"You heard him. How much money you got in there?" one of the other men said.

Then Dawson remembered the "devalue" technique from Blauer's CrossFit Defense course. The technique isn't a kick or a punch—or any kind of physical maneuver. She hit cancel and started screaming at the ATM, yelling about having no money and flailing around in what was essentially a foul-mouthed temper tantrum.

"I hit the cancel button and went crazy ... cussing and yelling. I screamed, 'I can't believe that motherfucking bastard took all my money,'" Dawson said.

The men backed away. One of them said, "Oh, she's crazy," as they disappeared.

Dawson got in her car and drove home, safe.



Courtesy of Glory Dawson

**When confronted with potential danger, Glory Dawson remembered Tony Blauer's words and "went crazy."**

Blauer, the CrossFit Defense and Spontaneous Protection Enabling Accelerated Response (SPEAR) System creator, knows a lot about fighting. His company, Blauer Tactical Systems (BTS), has taught performance-enhancement, fear-management and combative techniques to military, law-enforcement and civilian personnel since 1979.

For a guy who has spent most of his life coaching, researching and studying fights, Blauer goes out of his way to teach people how to avoid them. He spends as much time on the mental and emotional aspects of self-defense as he does on the physical skills.

One of the key self-defense skills Blauer teaches has nothing to do with kicks or punches. It has to do with devaluing yourself as a victim so the potential attacker never becomes the actual attacker.

"Win the fight by not having one," Blauer said.

### What Bad Guys Want

Blauer has a background in wrestling, martial arts and boxing and has been working with law enforcement and the military for years. The basic idea of the SPEAR System is to turn the body's natural startle-and-flinch response into effective self-defense. It's about using your body's instinctive reactions to your benefit and understanding what a bad guy wants and doesn't want.

Blauer says bad guys want one of three things: your property, your body or your life. What they don't want is to get hurt, to get caught or for the confrontation to take too long. If you can show a bad guy that you don't have what he wants, or that a confrontation with you will be loud and difficult, you have a chance of stopping the trajectory of a potentially dangerous situation before it evolves into something worse.

In 2007, [ATM Strategy With Tony Blauer](#) appeared on CrossFit.com. In it, Blauer demonstrates how to make yourself a bad target for potential assailants. He acts out how would-be victims can, after sensing danger, devalue themselves to an attacker during a transaction at an ATM machine.

After hitting cancel on his transaction, Blauer yells at the ATM, "What do you mean insufficient funds? This is bullshit! I have money in here!" His goal in this display of completely artificial rage is to communicate to the bad guy that he is both broke and slightly unstable—not a great target.

As Dawson found out, the technique is so crazy it works.

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**Blauer’s goal in this display of completely artificial rage is to communicate to the bad guy that he is both broke and slightly unstable—not a great target.**

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Dawson took one of Blauer’s CrossFit Defense seminars at CrossFit San Diego. She’d seen the ATM video.

“The whole ‘Tony Blauer thing’ I remembered was to devalue yourself. I guess my goal was to act like I didn’t have any money and act crazy. I pulled off the crazy part pretty good,” Dawson said.

“If I hadn’t learned that, I don’t know,” she said. “I probably would have turned around and engaged them, which would have probably been a bad idea. After that, I don’t know.”

This technique requires two things. First, it requires an awareness of your surroundings. You have to employ the technique before you are attacked. Second, it requires fear management—the presence of mind to act while feeling threatened or afraid.

“Ninety-nine percent of the people who have survived a violent attack said they knew—there was a premonition or a bad feeling,” Blauer said.

“People lose because of fear,” Blauer said. “Fear creates doubt. Doubt creates hesitation. In some cases, that can turn into inaction. If that happens during a real violent attack, well, you can imagine the outcome.”

Blauer continued: “The mind navigates the body.” It’s normal to freeze, but Blauer said it’s possible to manage your fear and break out of that frozen state.

Blauer teaches kicking, hitting, kneeing, elbowing and gouging (he calls them “close-quarters tools”), but he emphasizes the cerebral side of self-defense. His No. 1 piece of advice is simple: Stop the fight before it starts. While it’s good to know self-defense techniques in case a dangerous situation develops, avoiding an attack in the first place guarantees safety.



Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

*“Win the fight by not having one.” —Tony Blauer*

Courtesy of Joshua Dean



***When Josh Dean sensed he was in trouble, he implemented Blauer's devaluation strategy immediately and avoided an potential altercation.***

### Early Morning Defense

Josh Dean is an early bird. He coaches the 5:30-a.m. class at CrossFit Peoria in Peoria, Illinois. Dean said Peoria is a fairly safe town, but last year there were reports of three men mugging people. They hit them, kicked them and even used baseball bats. The victims ended up in intensive care.

One morning, when Dean arrived to unlock the gym, he noticed three young guys standing on the street corner.

"Holy shit!" he thought. "Those are probably the guys."

The men weren't dressed to work out, and Dean didn't know of anyone coming for an introductory class. He knew something was wrong. Then the men started walking toward him.

"I had just seen the (ATM) video a week earlier," Dean said. "I thought, 'I gotta do something.' I thought, 'The ATM video might work here.'"

He got to the door to the gym, put the key in and pretended it didn't work.

"Fuck! You gotta be fucking kidding me. Why would she do that?" Dean yelled at the door.

He stomped his feet, turned around and marched angrily to his car. The three men walked away. Dean got into the car and started it as though he was going to leave.

"I just sat in my and car started it up," he said. "I was shaking and nervous. It was a huge adrenaline dump—like I had just finished a round of Fran or something."

While he didn't know for sure if the men were the muggers he had read about in the paper, he said he didn't want to find out.

"Like Coach Blauer said in that video, most people have a premonition. If you have it, don't sit on it. Do something. I believe that video saved me a serious ass whooping," Dean said. "Maybe my life."

In the CrossFit Defense course, Blauer teaches the three D's: detect, defuse and defend. Detect refers to using your senses and instincts to sense a threat. If you can escape without engaging, that's the best option. A technique for defusing a confrontation is devaluing yourself as a target. Defending yourself is the last resort.

"If we only covered the physical, then someone has to wait until they get in a fight to test and apply it," Blauer said.

"Instead, I want you to, when you smell smoke, take action. Look around. If you see a fire starting, take action—stomp it out. If you can't put the fire out, take action—run. But it starts with smoke," he said.

Blauer believes CrossFit athletes are already predisposed to self-defense.

"They have an advantage. That's why we love working with CrossFit athletes," Blauer said.

"The (CrossFit workout) experience starts off with a holy-shit moment—that's the first look at the workout on the whiteboard. Then comes strategy, figuring out how you're going to hit it and move. Then comes the mental toughness. That's the part when you want to stall or quit but you do another rep instead," Blauer said.

It's not just the strength and fitness of CrossFit athletes that make them better prepared to defend themselves, Blauer said. It's the mental toughness and grace under pressure that give CrossFit athletes an advantage.

Yelling at an ATM while surrounded by four threatening men takes a degree of mental toughness. It requires going

against the body's instincts, just like in a workout when the body is screaming, "Take a break, put the bar down." CrossFit athletes are conditioned to ignore that voice and keep going.

"The learning curve is shorter, and it's a cool epiphany when a CrossFit athlete realizes the sport and the training they love has another function, perhaps more important than the training itself," Blauer said.

### Functional Defense

San Francisco CrossFit coach and gymnast Carl Paoli grew up in Spain. As a child, Paoli said he was bullied, attacked and mugged. He said he was afraid to go out in public for fear of being attacked. He carried that with him into his adult life.

"I always weighed my decisions through the fear," Paoli said. "You become very tired of it."

Paoli met Blauer at a course in Las Vegas, Nevada, several years ago.

"Tony talked about how you have to have a strategy and a plan, like a blueprint for how you organize yourself in those situations to create an exit plan," Paoli said.

Paoli watched Blauer's ATM video. He was amused but not convinced.

He said, "I remember thinking, 'No one would do that. That is ridiculous. It wouldn't work.'"

Until it did.

Last year, Paoli was walking into a coffee shop that shared a building with a bank. On his way in, he noticed a guy leaning against the wall. For reasons Paoli couldn't articulate, the guy made him feel uncomfortable. He got the same feeling he used to get when he was a kid just before getting mugged.

Paoli went into the coffee shop, took care of his business and exited. The guy was still there, staring at him. He stepped off the wall and began walking toward Paoli. Instead of panicking, Paoli employed the first self-defense technique he could think of. He put his phone to his ear as though he had a call and started yelling and cursing and screaming at an imaginary person on the other end.

"I just went crazy," he said.

The would-be attacker looked his way and returned to lean back against the wall. Paoli kept moving.

"I called Tony, yelling, and told him, 'I just used one of your strategies in real life!'" Paoli said. "I had learned something about self-defense from Tony without even practicing."



Courtesy of Carl Paoli

**Carl Paoli was skeptical of Blauer's ATM technique until he had to use it himself.**

"As a coach, my goal is to teach people to move through space safely, to go in and come out unharmed," Paoli said. "I teach that from a mechanical perspective: movement. Tony teaches the same thing from a psychological, physiological and physical perspective."

He continued: "We define CrossFit as 'constantly varied functional movement performed at a high intensity.' You don't know what you are going to get, and when you do, it is fast, aggressive and right now—like a mugging."

Paoli sees CrossFit Defense as similar to his own Freestyle courses: athletes apply skills and strengths learned inside the gym outside in the world, away from barbells, rings and kettlebells.

"CrossFit is really about functionality, and Tony Blauer is bringing this back. Tony Blauer is teaching functionality and using self-defense ... to teach functionality. That is CrossFit," Paoli said.

## Crazy Right Now

Jennifer Peck took a CrossFit Defense course from Blauer when she worked out at CrossFit Las Vegas. Fast-forward a few years, and she found herself at a gas station in the wrong part of town.

"I didn't know you didn't go there alone at night," Peck said.

Peck had just gotten off a phone call with a customer-service representative from her credit-card company, straightening out an issue about some purchases they thought might be fraudulent. The conversation was fresh in her mind when she got out of the car and started walking toward the market. She looked up and saw four shadowy figures approaching her.

"This is not good," she thought. Peck remembered Blauer telling her she had to act, to break out of her frozen state.

"I told myself, 'You need to do something or this is going to be bad.'"

Remembering the ATM video, she hit redial on her phone and started screaming at it.

"I have no fucking money, no gas. You better turn my credit card on now!" she yelled.

"I didn't even think about, 'What if it doesn't work?' I just knew I needed to be crazy right now ... let them know this is the wrong target."

The four men looked at her, stopped and walked away.

"And I am just standing there like a crazy woman screaming into a silent phone," Peck said.

"If I had not taken that class, I would have just froze," Peck said.

Peck's experience at the gas station, she said, taught her as much about herself as CrossFit has.

"It's not about (performing well in) some workout," Peck said. "It is just about being stronger than you know. That strength is as much physical as it is mental."

## Spreading Knowledge

Blauer's CrossFit Defense courses feature his self-defense tactics based on the body's physiological response to danger, and he uses CrossFit movements that mirror simple combative techniques. The course also addresses fear-management techniques and how to detect and defuse a threat—the technique in the ATM video.

In addition to his course offerings, Blauer wanted to spread his knowledge just like CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman did when he started posting workouts on CrossFit.com. Blauer loved how CrossFit offered free training advice and jumped at the chance to offer tips to the community.

Blauer put up his ATM video as a way to help people learn simple rules of awareness and how to manipulate behavior. In the end, he wanted people to laugh at a video and think, "I could do that."

"It's fun, it's important, it's immediate, and it's made up of uncommon sense," Blauer said.

Like any CrossFit specialty seminar, a CrossFit Defense course won't make you an expert in a day or a weekend. However, even a three-minute video can be life changing, and learning basic self-defense techniques can make all the difference when you suddenly feel as if something is very wrong.



## About the Authors

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