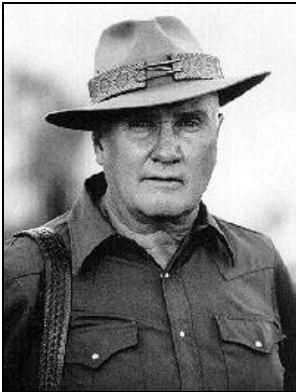




## Urban Survival: The Color Code of Awareness

By Joe Nottoli



The Color Code of Awareness is often referred to as the *Combat Mindset* or *The Cooper Color Code*. The system was developed by Lt. Col. “Jeff” Cooper. Cooper was a US Marine who saw combat in the Pacific during World War II and Korea. He developed and refined many firearms and shooting techniques that are the cornerstone of modern weapon craft. He was a prolific writer whose works are widely read today. He founded Gunsite – a world-class training facility for military, law enforcement and citizens.

The Color Code was developed by Cooper to teach the military the mental construct of awareness – how to process information, react and survive on the battlefield. It has been adopted by law enforcement agencies and by citizens who carry firearms.

I believe that mastering the Code is critical if you are to carry a firearm for self defense. To not do so is dangerous to yourself and others. I will continue to refer to Cooper’s *Combat Mindset* as the “Color Code” or the “Code” in this piece. Mastering the Code is valuable whether or not you carry a firearm and whether or not there is danger present. It is a way of life that may help you survive a dangerous situation, but more importantly, may help you to *avoid* one.

### Scenarios and State of Mind

The Code is just a state of mind – living in a state of awareness and reacting to scenarios that may present themselves. We think in and rehearse scenarios all of the time: “If that car comes into my lane, I will accelerate, brake, swerve, honk my horn, etc.” or “That guy walking ahead of me looks suspicious. If he accosts that lady over there, I have my phone in hand ready to dial 911. I’ll scream and render aid if I have to.”

The *Survival Series* has been trying to get you to start planning ahead and thinking in scenarios, in order to react to a ‘what if?’ scenario quickly. To do that, you must first *see* it happening! (Awareness can be 90% of the fight.) Sounds simple, right? It will be. Let’s get to it.

## The Colors



**Condition White:** Oblivious to your surroundings.

This is how most people spend their lives – everywhere. They walk down the street lost in their thoughts or their text messages. They are completely engrossed in their books while sitting on park benches. They aren't paying attention to what's going on around them.

Criminals love this condition. "Whites" are the easiest marks to attack, steal from, or violate. They never see it coming. They are completely at a criminal's mercy and can only react when it is too late.



**Condition Yellow:** Relaxed Alertness.

Condition Yellow should be your normal, everyday state of awareness. You're not hyper, sweating, or jittery. Instead, you are walking confidently, your head is up and you are visually scanning the area for possible danger.

Scanning for danger is no different than crossing the street. You just look to your left and right as you exit buildings, enter parking lots, or turn a corner. This gives you information about who is around you.

You also want to check who or what is behind you with a short occasional glance over your shoulder as you transition from place to place. You should know how far away people and things are from you.

In Condition Yellow you are not preoccupied. As you move into different areas, your phone is put away and you are not lost in your thoughts.

Under condition yellow, there are no specific threats, but you are alert to the possibility. You know that you may have to defend yourself today.



**Condition Orange:** Focused Alertness – The threat condition is possible trouble. You now must have *focused* awareness.

When you go to Condition Orange your situational awareness is elevated because a potential threat has presented itself and you must begin to make rapid decisions on how to deal with it.



**Condition Red:** High awareness with action required *now*.

When you go to Condition Red, you are now reacting to threats presented to you. This is the time for fight or flight.

A big part of the Code's situational awareness is considering your options in various scenarios. You should mentally rehearse potential solutions in case an incident occurs. For example, if you go to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of a building you have never visited before, you should think to yourself 'if there is a fire in this building, how do I get out?'. Then take note of the fire exits and the routes to get there. Or, contemplate the actions you would take if you were eating in a restaurant when a take-over robbery occurred.

For people who presently operate in a Condition White, this will seem strange and difficult. It takes discipline to practice being observant. However, once you have begun to do it on a regular basis, it becomes almost second-nature. This skill will buy you time and distance in an emergency, which could save your life and the lives of others.

## **Threats**

Threats can take many forms: fire, storms, people and even animals. For our discussion, let's focus on criminals that intend to make you a victim and how you should react. Any time you are confronted with a potential assailant, take note of their eyes and hands. Are they sizing you up? Are they reaching for something? Their body language *will* betray their intent. Remember, where there is one assailant there will often be a second, so take quick visual scans to the sides and behind you. Make sure you are not being stalked from the rear.

Once you have surveyed what is happening around you, listen to your instincts. People often report after an assault that they *knew* something was wrong, but they just did not listen to their gut.

Now make a decision: continue with your business or evade. Remember, when in doubt: walk away. Evasion will show you an assailant's intentions. If they follow you there is a high probability that an attack is coming and you will know to take further defensive measures.

## **Trigger Points**

By considering what happens during a street confrontation, home invasion, or take-over robbery, you mentally prepare yourself to deal with unfolding trouble.

For most of us, we will need to do research by reading or watching news accounts of violent incidents. Then, we'll need to imagine how we'd react in the various scenarios.

You will want to think about your reaction in three stages: **1) Evade, 2) Transition, and 3) Fight.**

Ask yourself three questions:

1. How can I **Evade** the problem? Even when armed, flight is often more advantageous than fighting.

2. At what point do I **Transition**? If you carry a weapon or mace, at what point do you move it into your fighting hand from your holster, purse, or pocket? You will want to consider how to keep it concealed until you are ready to use it.
3. At what point do you **Fight** and use your weapon?

Once you know the conditions under which you will *evade, transition, or fight*, you will have your trigger points. As a threat unfolds, you move through action steps in response to the triggers.

### **A Scenario**

Let look at an example: You are walking to your car at night, through a residential neighborhood. You are maintaining a Code Yellow level of awareness. The street is very quiet and there are very few people out. Suddenly, a man crosses the street moving directly into your path of travel.

You switch to Code Orange awareness. How is the man dressed? Is he sizing you up? Is there anyone coming from behind you? You do quick checks to the sides and behind and look directly at the on-coming man. You see that he is looking right at you. He is dressed in jeans, boots and a jacket capable of hiding a weapon. He is still about 10 yards away.

This situation should trigger an *evade* response. You change your path and begin to cross the street to gain distance between you and the man. You angle yourself to see the man in your peripheral vision. If he is not a threat or if he decides you are too hard a target, he will keep going.

But, in this case he follows you. Most people panic in this situation. For you, this should trigger a *transition* response and you are now in Condition Red awareness.

If you have a weapon, move it into your fighting hand. A weapon can be gun, knife, mace, keys or a small flashlight. You do not have to show the weapon, the transition motion may end the aggression because the potential assailant has reason to be concerned for his own safety.

In this case it does. The man turns abruptly and moves away from you quickly. Most people at this point will sigh with relief and turn inward, thinking about how close a call that was. But, you are in Condition Red awareness and you know that this could just be a ploy for you to drop your guard. You begin doing checks 360° around you as you move rapidly toward your car. Your weapon is still at the low ready, but not obvious to others.

Your action may allow you to get to your car and drive away without a further problem. Except, you notice a second man standing in the dark, partially hidden by stairs, very close to where the first assailant came from. There is a very short distance between you and he is now moving toward you.

The *fight* response has just been triggered. You do not know his intent. He could be a random drunk stumbling out of the dark or he could be someone with ill intent, who may want to rob or harm you. At this point your weapon is at the high-ready. You bark the command to “Stop, do not move. Keep your hands where I can see them.” In 80% of the cases, this will end the confrontation. The would-be assailant will most likely leave in a big hurry. Then, while you remain in Condition Red, you make your way to your car to clear the area.

If you find yourself in the 20% of confrontations that result in violent action, you must quickly determine if **three** conditions have been met before you use deadly force.

1. Do you fear for your life or the possibility of grave physical harm?
2. Do you have an avenue for escape?
3. Does your assailant have a weapon or is he making furtive movements?  
(Movement consistent with drawing a weapon.)

When these conditions are fully met, you must *react without thinking* – with no hesitation. This is important. You will not have time to think.

**The proper use of lethal force** is too large a topic to be detailed here. But, your decision to use it should be informed by tactical training, by the law, and by your relationship with and understanding of God.

If you are or will be carrying a firearm, it is critical to rehearse the scenarios under which you would use potentially lethal force. Don’t consider whether or not your situation will require you to shoot as it unfolds. Then it is too late. You will be injured or killed. Do this beforehand. There will be too much going on to debate whether or not you’ll shoot. This is really what the Code is for: escalation of force and your response to it.

## **Down Time**

Human beings cannot be “switched on” all the time – even in Condition Yellow. They have to relax at some point. Soldiers who try to be battle-ready at all times will get tired and make mistakes – creating the possibility of getting themselves or others killed.

You have to “Go White” at some point. Might I suggest you do it while behind locked doors. Just be ready to switch to Yellow if something goes ‘bump’ outside.

## **The Next Steps**

### **Exercise:**

**Step One** – Practice being in Condition Yellow. As you move throughout your day, do 360° checks as you exit your car, enter a parking lot, enter or leave a building. Be serious about it. You *will* improve. Practice for 18 days and the Color Code will become a habit and a normal part of your life.

**Step Two** – Practice being in Condition Orange and Red by skimming news reports, TV shows, and movies with violent incidents, and think about how you would react to them. Play the scenario out in your mind. What did the victim do right? What did they do wrong?

**Step Three** – Take tactical shooting courses. You can get videos from [www.opsgear.com](http://www.opsgear.com) and other sites that walk you through various scenarios. Sign up at a gun range for a hands-on course.

**Step Four** – Practice transitions with whatever weapon you want to use. Do it in the complete dark. You can blindfold yourself or turn out the lights at night. You should be able to get your weapon out quickly and to the high ready without seeing it. **WARNING: be sure that firearms are COMPLETELY UNLOADED and that there is NO AMMO in your practice area!** You may want to consider rubber practice knives and objects similar in size to mace containers. Move slowly until you build proper technique. Then, work on speed. Most importantly: **Be safe!**

Videos and books can be helpful aids in developing weapon craft. But, in-person is best. Consider training with some of these professionals:

<http://www.nrahq.org/education/training/index.asp> (NRA site for info),

<http://www.shootrite.org/> (basic safety to advanced tactical – range. N. AL.),

<http://www.sandyspringsshootingrange.com/> (local shop/range),

<http://www.bigwoodsgoods.com/> (local shop/range),

<http://hicaliberfirearms.com/> (local shop/range).

There are so many more. These are just a few close to (our) home.

*Remember you do not need everything today. You just need to work at it. Now, go execute.*

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Please visit us at <http://www.thegeorgia9-12project.org> for more installments of our **Survival Series** and for other useful information. Consider joining a chapter near you. It's free.

*Mr. Nottoli works in the Web development/IT field. He serves on the board of the Northwest Georgia 9/12 Project, a group serving the Northwest Atlanta metro area and beyond. He is a tactical firearms enthusiast, and though he laments his middle-aged eyes, he believes that they'd probably be good enough, while realizing that 'good enough' is never good enough! He resides with his family somewhere in the Atlanta metro area.*

The Georgia 9/12 Project.org: "Promoting states' rights, The Constitution, limited government and the rule of law."