

Defending Your Firearm, Your Life Depends on It

By Tracy Hightower

The first thing we need to understand about Weapon Retention is that the best defense we have for countering a weapon grab is our brain. If we employ good mindset, awareness and sound tactics, weapon retention should never be an issue. In most instances where people have had to fight for their own weapon, they can point back to a mistake they themselves made that allowed it to happen. Whether it was because they were in condition white and allowed someone to get too close to them and attempt to remove their weapon from a holster or, when covering someone or searching for someone with weapon in hand, they employed poor tactics and gave someone an opportunity to grab for their weapon.

Having said all that, one might ask why we need to teach weapon retention methods. Well, we are human, and we all make mistakes and when we make those mistakes and find ourselves fighting for our lives, we want to have a plan. Did I mention that if someone tries to take your weapon you are fighting for your life? Yes, if someone takes your weapon they are not going to put it down and say "Ok now we are even, Let's settle this with fist's." If someone takes your weapon, they will kill you and you are justified in using Deadly Force to defend that weapon.

Weapon Retention training for handguns comes in two forms. Retaining the weapon while in the holster and retaining the weapon while in hand. First I want to talk a little about equipment. When carrying a firearm you should always choose your equipment based on quality and not price and style. This is very important when choosing a belt and holster. You do not want to have the tactics you use to defend your weapon to fail because you chose a poor quality belt and Holster. Many times in training I have taken students guns and holsters off of their belts because they had poor quality equipment. I have even taken a belt or two, so choose wisely. Another factor to consider is mode of carry. If you are a civilian or an off duty LEO you should always make sure your firearm is concealed at all times. If nobody knows you have a firearm, then the less likely it is that you will have to fight for it while it is holstered. If you are a LEO and carrying on duty you should invest in a good quality retention holster if your department does not issue one to you. However, do not depend on the retention abilities of your holster alone. Learn sound tactics for defending your weapon. One other thing you should consider in the way of equipment is an edged weapon dedicated to defending your firearm from attack. I recommend a fixed blade knife carried on the weak side belt.

Whether attacked from the front, back or side, if someone gets their hand on your weapon while it is holstered you need to act immediately. Using your strong hand, trap the weapon in the holster by applying as much downward pressure as necessary on the person's hand and your weapon to keep it from being removed. Move! Do not stand still. Move rapidly in tight circles in either direction. You will find through training that depending on how and with what hand the person grabbed your weapon, turning rapidly in a certain direction while his/her hand is trapped will cause pain and injury that will motivate them to want to let go of your weapon. Moving rapidly also has the effect of resetting your attacker's OODA Loop and causing him/her to now have to respond to your actions instead of you to his. At the same time you should be using your weak hand to inflict pain and injury. This is not the school playground nor is it a time to be timid. This is a time to be crushing someone's larynx or shoving your thumb into his or her eye socket. Or, you could use that fixed blade knife I mentioned. Whatever you do needs to be done immediately and with a fierce determination to maintain control of your weapon, for if you fail you are likely to die.

As with holster retention, having to fight for your firearm while it is in hand can be avoided by using mindset and awareness as well as sound tactics. If you are covering someone with a firearm do not get too close and never allow him or her to approach close enough to attempt a weapon grab. If you are searching for someone with gun in hand, do not lead with your firearm when approaching doorways and corners. If however someone does get his or her hands on your firearm your response should be immediate and decisive. Jerk sharply while stepping back to regain control. If that fails, drop to one knee while attempting to direct the muzzle into their midsection and fire. Dropping to one knee serves the purpose of lowering your center of gravity and getting your opponent off balance. If after firing, your attacker has not let go of your firearm then fall on your back while dragging your opponent with you placing your foot into his mid section and using his momentum to flip him over you. Most attackers will let go once they start to get off balance. This sounds like a long drawn out process but in reality it should be done in one concerted movement (Jerk, Drop, Fire, Fall, Flip) and the key again is resetting your opponents OODA Loop by requiring him to react to your actions. If you are using a revolver, your revolver may not be capable of firing if someone is holding it in such a way as to prevent rotation of the cylinder. If you are using a semi-automatic and your attacker maintained a good grip on the slide when you fired, then your weapon has an empty cartridge in the chamber and you need to recharge it immediately upon regaining control.

The defense against a weapon grab while carrying a long gun would be much the same as the defense for retaining a handgun while in hand with some notable exceptions. First, if you are carrying a semi-automatic rifle or shotgun you can fire the weapon numerous times as it is unlikely that a weapon grab will inhibit either of these types of firearm's ability to function. Secondly, when using a long gun you should always use a Tac-Sling, as this will help you retain the weapon and allow you to use one or both of your hands for attacking or drawing a sidearm. Another option to consider when someone attempts to relieve you of a long gun (The one you did not have a Tac-Sling on) is to simply let him have the gun while drawing your sidearm and engaging the now armed bad guy.

At Tactical Response, we are always striving to find ways to give our students the advantage when fighting for their lives. Quality training in Weapon Retention skills is something every person who carries a firearm should acquire. Don't simply rely on articles to do your training. Learning these and other skill at a quality school under the guidance of competent instructors cannot be substituted by reading alone. Now go out and train.

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