



The Realities of Not Having a Mission

by Dan Chavez

Neville heard the noise outside in the driveway. It had been a year since someone had broken into their car and stole Carmen's purse and tablet. It sounded like someone was trying to get in to the car again. He alerted Carmen who was serving breakfast to the girls. "I think I left my work ID in there," she cursed. Everyone was already dressed to leave the house, the girls were in their school uniforms and Carmen and Neville were dressed for work. They were both concealed weapons carriers and had their respective firearms on them. They had long fantasized about the possibility of having caught that burglar red handed last year. If they had only heard them last year, they would have jumped out and caught the thief. This was the chance they had wished for. Neville told Carmen to go out the front door and confront the thief directly. Neville would go out the back door and loop around the back of the house and come out the gate, flanking him. He bounded out of the house before she could ask him if she should call 911.

She walked outside cautiously, the reality and fear forming a ball in her stomach. As she stood on the porch, she could see the young man opening the door of her car and digging around inside. She drew her gun and thought quickly about what she was going to say to him. It should be something badass that she can tell people later. As she started to open her mouth, she felt a rush next to her. She was shoved hard to the ground and her gun went clattering off the porch. She felt strong hands clamp on her arms and lift her up, dragging her inside. She heard her daughters' scream as she saw the men tossed her on the floor in front of them. She counted three armed men in front of her, four when the young man who was in her car came in holding her gun. He locked the door as one of his cohorts rushed to secure the back. She didn't know where her husband was. He never appeared through the side gate like he was supposed to. She saw the keys to that gate were still on the hook. What was going to happen? Does Neville know what happened? Is he ok? Why didn't we call the police? What are they going to do with us?

So reading this, you are probably thinking about all the things the couple did wrong. She and Neville made a lot of mistakes. Many of you are thinking about how you would have scanned the windows and area around the porch. How you would have remembered the keys for the side gate. You would have locked the door behind you protecting the kids. You can "Monday morning quarterback" this story all you want, but can you spot the first mistake? *The real mistake?* Neville and Carmen risked their safety and the safety of their children . . . for a work ID.



Having the proper mindset and understanding your mission are paramount. There are too many stories like this where people get way too caught up in the moment and make bad decisions. Everyone loves to think about the best-case scenario, but do you consider the worst case? “Carmen” sure didn’t. In truth, she actually never gave it much thought. See “Carmen” was a real person. I talked to her after the incident at her house. It went down pretty much the same except the group of guys rushed past her and they all ran down the street. She walked out to the street to see where they were going and one of them started to draw a gun at her. She drew her gun and they both fired, missing each other. Now she told me she thought she was very lucky, and she was, but not for the reasons she believed. I explained how she didn’t consider what could have gone wrong.

The first thing I discussed with her . . . the variables. The things that her and her boyfriend didn’t consider. Was the guy breaking into her car alone? Was he armed? What if that group of guys who rushed past her actually rushed at her? I laid out the scenario I wrote above and her face dropped. She never considered the fact that she left the kids alone and didn’t lock the door. She was already upset and dealing with the trauma from the shooting, but this hit her like a ton of bricks. I told her that most people just never consider all the variables. Not only that, the stress of the situation usually affects your decision-making processes too. Everyone wants to think they will be their best self in a stressful situation, but most of us can’t even leave an argument without thinking about what you could have done better. I asked her, “Do you remember being calm before you went outside?” She said “Absolutely not! The second Neville said there was someone outside, I could hear my heart beating in my chest!”

I then asked her what was going through her mind at that moment. She said “I just wanted to catch that guy!” I asked her, “What if you got out there and he heard you coming? What if he pulls a gun and starts shooting? Were you prepared for a gun fight? Did you know what to use for cover? Would his line of fire go through the front of your house? Were your kids in his line of fire? What about your line of fire? Would you be firing towards the neighbors across the street?”

She reeled at the barrage of questions. She started with “well, my boyfriend...” but I interrupted her to remind her that he never made it past the side gate. She thought a bit and said, “I didn’t think about any of that.” I said “Look, most people don’t think about these things, but they should. Now, you have had a rare experience where you are able to learn from your mistakes. You need to remember what you thought was going to happen and what did happen.”

The second factor is legalities. Most people don’t really familiarize themselves with the law in their state. If you are going to be a “law abiding citizen”, it would make sense that you actually learn the law. When I first started taking my training seriously, I attended a legal seminar with the then leading self-defense attorney in my county. It was a 3 hour course where the lawyer discussed state law, how it has been interpreted in the past, and he had several guest speakers



ranging from prosecutors to Police officers. They all broke down our local self-defense laws, do's and don'ts, and the particulars of the Castle Doctrine. I ask her what she knew about her local laws. She said, "Well, I know the Castle Doctrine would have protected us if anything happened." I told her the Castle Doctrine protects you "inside your castle" and to some extent right outside your house, but don't think that those laws mean that after a shooting you are free and clear. Unfortunately, in most self-defense shootings there are really two battles. The first initial battle for your life, then inevitably, you will have a second battle in the legal system.

I hit her with another barrage of questions. "Did you think about what could have happened if you had shot the man outside, how much you would have had to pay in lawyer fees to defend yourself if it wasn't immediately deemed a "self-defense" case? What about the civil case when his family sued you? What if you missed and your shots had hit the neighbor's house? What if you hit a neighbor? This time I saw she was getting very upset, so I backed off a bit. I didn't want to work her up to the point where she would shut down. I gave her a ten minute break.

When she came back, I gave her another hypothetical. What if you went outside, saw the guy breaking into the car, you challenge him, and he turns, you think you see a weapon, you shoot, you hit him, he falls, turns out it wasn't a weapon. Now many people will argue that the perception of a weapon could exonerate you, but you are going to go to court no matter what. You will have to pay for a lawyer, not a cheap one either. It can cost up to \$50,000 to retain a lawyer. The longer the case drags out, the more you will have to pay. How long will that case last? Well, that depends. Did you kill the burglar? Did you injure them? Are they in the hospital? How badly are they injured? Are they a minor? Is the family of the burglar suing you? These kinds of cases can cost thousands of dollars and they frequently can get prolonged. You can wind up paying around \$300,000 in lawyer fees alone, and that's if you win. If you lose, you could lose much more, like your freedom. All these factors need to be weighed against what is at risk. Personally, my family is worth this risk, but my car? Nah, it's insured. I'll call the police, be a good witness, and spare my family and I all of the Issues I mentioned earlier.

So I asked Carmen, was that work ID worth the safety of her and her family, her freedom, and their financial security? She agreed that she and her boyfriend never considered all these factors. I asked her, what is your mission? What is the purpose of having and carrying a firearm? What are your boundaries in terms of what you are willing and not willing to do?

Celebrated self defense instructor Varg Freeborn always asks this and urges you to understand your mission and to stick with it. Carmen said she guessed her mission was to protect her family. So I asked, if your mission is to protect your family, then why would you leave them to go stop the burglar from breaking into your car? We need to understand what our mission is and stick to it. If you state your mission is to "fight evil, where ever I find it, and to save all in distress," more power to you, go forth and save the world. But in reality, the majority of people just want to protect themselves and their family. If that's your mission, stick to it. Make sure



every decision is based on protecting them. The law and juries will mostly understand and sympathize with someone protecting their family, but won't be so understanding for anything else, including you coming to someone else's aid.

I ended the conversation with Carmen by reminding her that her story ended with a very good ending. Her family was alright, she wasn't shot, she didn't hurt anyone, she wasn't being charged with anything, they never got into her car, her work ID was safe, and she only had to go to court as a witness. In the grand scheme of things, she won. But ultimately, she was lucky that events turned out the way they did.

We talked about how she could have avoided the entire situation by just calling the police and staying inside. She actually had complete control of the situation, she just didn't know it. In the Karate Kid (1984 version), Mr. Miyagi says "Daniel-san, best block...no be there". This means that the best defense for an attack is to not be where the attack happens. Either not being in the path of a strike, or avoiding the fight altogether.

People love to bluster and brag about what they would do in a fight. Many will tell you that they "wish they had the chance" to catch the bad guy or even shoot them. Hell, Neville said as much. But in reality, is it worth it? You have to consider cost versus gain. What are you risking, what will you gain...what could you lose? The reality is, the only way to truly guarantee victory in a self-defense event is to do your best to avoid it all together. Be prepared for a fight, train hard, but if you can keep out of harm's way, you've already won.