

Advance or Retreat?

The Shoulder-Shoved Scenario



by Keith Pascal

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Introduction



Even though we are about to talk a very specific type of aggressive action, the advice can be generalized to other situations and attacks. The key is being able to determine why certain situations would require one response over another.

Since I can't be there at the party coaching you, and I have no clue what tools and skills you possess (mastered martial-arts techniques and strategies), I'll try to keep the discussion general.

This is more of an instruction ebooklet on how to respond, rather than a tutorial of specific techniques.

I hope you find it valuable.

Keith

A Solid Surprise Shoulder Shove

First, The Scenario

You are standing there holding a cracker with cheese on it, talking to another party guest. Suddenly, and I do mean without warning, someone approaches from the side and back.

Before you realize that anyone other than another happy, party guest is close by, “Blammo” -- you feel a solid shove to your shoulder. It could be hard enough that it causes you to take a couple of steps.

Now, what?

Shoved Response Options

As mentioned in the Introduction, I don't know what style you practice, how old you are, how you stand, or how you react to violence. I also don't know what learned (or developed) reactions you exhibit.

I do know that when someone shoves you, or otherwise makes unfriendly contact, that you have three quick ways that you could interact with distance:

- Move closer to your opponent
- Distance yourself from your opponent
- Remain at the same distance

In this ebooklet, I just want to focus on where you are going to be in relation to your enemy after the initial “surprise” contact.

Note: The reason that I set the scenario up with a “shove” was because I understand that if you are coldcocked by your opponent, you could be unconscious without any opportunity to respond with your techniques. In this case, you get a chance to respond, since you were roughly shoved but not brain-rattled.

OK, you have been shoved.

If you are an efficient fighter, then your hand or foot will strike out, even before your body catches up by affecting a stance. Get it? The weapon begins the action; the body follows. (This is for the more accomplished practitioners.)

If you are a beginner, then you’ll try to block “after the fact.” Oops. You have already been shoved. So, it’s not a very effective response.

How Should You Respond?

Remember how I said that there are three choices of movement (including non-movement)?

The third shouldn’t normally be an option. Even if you are responding with a

punch before your body catches up, I am not sure you should plan on staying exactly where you are -- in relation to your attacker. In other words, if you have a split second to react or decide, don't opt for giving your enemy his or her preferred distance.

Note: Reread that last sentence. If you don't normally think this way, then this teensy, tiny little bit of information could be a complete paradigm shift. Yes, it's that important.

So, that leaves getting closer or distancing yourself. Let's talk about getting closer, first:

Infighting Your Shover

Someone at the party shoves you. The shove itself adds a little distance, but your newfound enemy rushes you again, immediately.

If you are the type who prefers hand-to-hand combat contact, then you need a close proximity to be able to "do your stuff." Fortunately, with the attacker's second wave, "you" might not have to step to him or her.

Your attacker's second charge could bring the two of you closer, almost automatically. The key is knowing how to interrupt the timing of that second rush toward you.

Also, keep in mind that, even though you are orienting on your enemy's centerline, you can step in "at an angle." (Worth considering.)



Gaining Enough Distance

Your other option is to distance yourself after that first shove.

Do you train both for stepping in AND for distancing yourself?

I'd like to end this part of the discussion by telling you of my wife's instinctive reaction ... after years of training.

The funny thing is, I am not sure what exercises I taught her that have made her response so automatic. I'm trying to retrace the last 22 years of her martial-arts practice, and I am coming up blank.

Here's what I am referring to:

In one case, she had to break up a very violent school fight, where suddenly one of the football players turned on her, after he shoved another kid's head into a locker ... repeatedly. A crowd had formed and Kate was the first teacher on the scene.

And in the other instance, while standing on a cobblestone street in Florence, Italy, she was struck in the arm by someone attacking with a water bottle. (It was wielded like a club.)

In both cases, she instantly snapped into a "bai jong" position -- she stood the way Bruce Lee did in his ready stance -- back heel off the floor, eying the opponent out of the corner of your eyes, and so on.

She was poised and ready....



Part 2

Let's shift our discussion to reasons why you'd affect a ready stance versus stepping in for an immediate counter attack.

Specifically, we're considering whether to strike or gain distance after that initial shove by an attacker.

Rather than walking you all the way through a specific method for dealing with your opponent -- ebooks like *How to End the Fight with One Hit and The Punch eCourse* can do that -- I'd like to give you some "gray matter" to consider in such a situation.

Let's recap: you are at a party, nursing that cracker topped with 'cheddary' goodness, when all of a sudden, BAM ... someone shoves you. And this brute is about to continue the charge and attack you again.

So, do you take a quick step back as you get into a ready stance? Or do you step in with a counterattack immediately?

First Consideration --

Can you strike back while taking one step only? Will you be able to reach your assailant with the strike -- kick or hit -- and possibly one scoot forward?

If you can't get to your opponent efficiently and quickly, then it might be advisable to get some distance, instead.

A lot of martial artists think that a fight is some sparring match with both parties dancing in and out, relating to each other, matching distance, and so on. I beg to differ.

From point of contact, the fight will be over in a second, if either fighter is a competent, and efficient fighter. It really does happen that quickly.

This means that taking a couple of steps to reach your opponent could be a no-no in this situation. The reasoning -- you want to be the one striking; you don't want to be picked off as you take multiple steps to come into range.

If you can't get in to your opponent with minimal movement, then maybe you need the safety of distance.

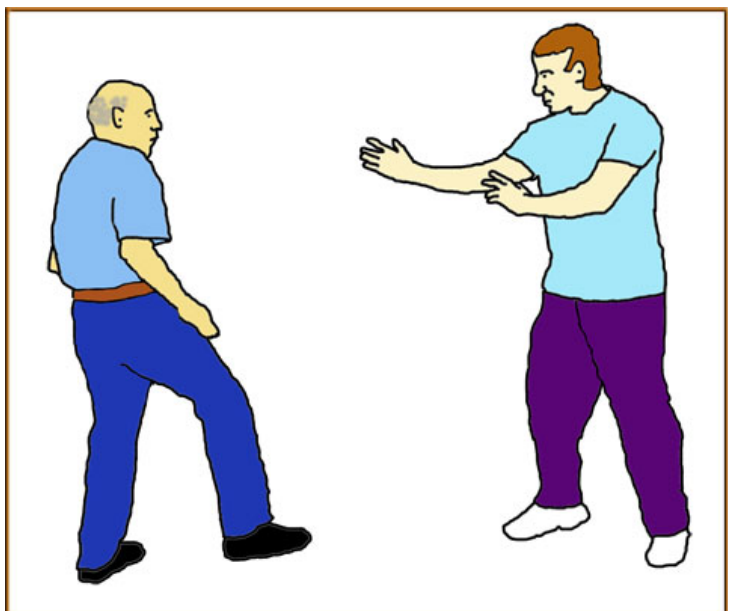
Second Consideration --

Do you need time to assess the situation or can you react almost reflexively?

BAM -- you are shoved. If the person is still in range, and you are that quick at judging that this is an emergency warranting a self-defense response, then go ahead and strike back without hesitation. Hit and step in.

Call it the automatic, trained ... and honed ... reflexes of a martial artist.

But if a hard shove forces you to take a couple of steps to regain your balance, then maybe you do want to slide back, away from your aggressor. Taking one step to get into your bai jong position (poised ready stance), could give you that little extra time that you need. It does take a little time to recover from a stumble.



Third Consideration --

Your step back doesn't have to be a true step. Maybe feigning a step in reverse is what you need to fake your opponent. You won't have much time to consider this tactic, but if your opponent hesitates after the first shove, then this could be the move to entice him to renew his charge. Sucker!

Fourth Consideration --

Earlier in this ebooklet, I talked about avoiding the other person's desired distance. You could close the distance by letting him come to you. A good strategy is to use your step back, or slight step forward and to the side as a way to get him to enter "your" preferred range.

Isn't the goal of the "game" (game = serious self-defense) to have your attacker step right into the perfect distance for you to surprise him with a ... POW, BAM, SMACK!

You get the idea.

Fifth Consideration --

Whether you move backwards or forward could depend on ... whether the shove-happy attacker is alone.

Are you about to deal with multiple attackers?

Think of yourself as the cue ball in a game of pool. You need to set up for future shots.

My guess is that you'll try to avoid stepping right between two attackers, unless you have a good, tactical reason to do so. Right? Maybe you wanted to step forward, but because of the placement of the second guy, you have to step back for better positioning.



About the Author

Keith Pascal has been studying martial arts most of his life. Since 1980, he has been a practitioner of practical, efficient martial arts.

In 2000, Keith left his high-school teaching career to pursue martial-arts writing full time. He is the author of several ebooks, including **How to End the Fight with One Hit** and **The Punch eCourse: How to Hit Harder, Faster, and More Effectively**.

His published books in print include **Control Your Fear: A Guide For Martial Artists**, **Wrist Locks: From Protecting Yourself to Becoming an Expert** (Revised), **Tiptoeing to Tranquility: The Parable for Finding Safety and Comfort in Dangerous Times**, and **Coin Snatching: The Reputation Builder** (hard cover only).

Keith lives with his wife, daughter, a black Labrador, and two cats, in Eugene, Oregon.