



Damian Ross

You Don't Need a Black Belt to Survive

by Sandy Howlett

People come to the *dojo* for a variety of reasons: to get fit, to develop discipline or to learn respect, among other things. In contrast to the old days, self-defense is often just a bullet point on a laundry list of benefits touted by school owners, rarely topping the chart. The Self Defense Company aims to correct that.

The Saddle River, New Jersey-based firm was founded in 2007 by a man who's no stranger to *Black Belt* readers: Damian Ross. He based his curriculum on the street-fighting and military tactics he'd been teaching since 1998. Now the CEO of SDC, Ross holds three black belts and is proud of his martial arts background—even though he thinks the traditional and spiritual components

of training have little to do with eliminating threats on the street.

"Martial arts has its place, and there are many benefits that can be life-altering," says Michael Archangel, vice president of programming and acting director of instructor development for SDC. "But martial arts is not self-defense."

Archangel says that when an instructor who teaches a nonviolent art claims to be passing along street-worthy fighting methods, he's misleading the public. That's why he and Ross have made it their mission to spread what they believe to be the truth about self-defense.

A glance at their website (selfdefensecompany.com) lets you know they mean business. SDC embraces a kill-or-be-killed mentality. Its goal is to teach students—be they men, women or children—critical survival skills as quickly as possible and prepare them to use as much force as necessary to prevail.

To that end, SDC offers a series of DVD training aids directed at individuals, families, instructors and the military. The company also conducts seminars for various segments of the population, including seniors and grade-schoolers. Their most popular product for men, both civilian and military, is the Self Defense Training System, a 12-step core-training series. For women, it's the 60 Minute Self Defense program. For kids and parents, it's the Family Safe Program.

In addition to DVD instruction, SDC offers train-the-trainer services. There are three variations: the Guardian Program, which allows organizations to add a defensive-tactics component to their curriculum; the Trainer Program, which helps individuals who want to start their own defensive-tactics business; and the Professional Instructor Program, which encompasses the Trainer Program in addition to providing students with resources for business development, consulting, certification and so on.

SDC's newest product, Guardian Defensive Tactics, covers arrest and control, restraint methods and weapon retention. Although the general public often finds this and SDC's other programs intimidating, it's only because they're denying the realities of crime in 21st-century America. Preparing yourself to deal with it is as "rational and proactive as seeing the eye doctor and dentist," Archangel says. "To the public, I would say: 'Do some homework and get some training. You don't need to be a warrior; just a survivor.'" ✂