

**EVOLVED**  
ADVANCED TECHNIQUES  
AND TRAINING METHODS

**REALITY-BASED**  
POWERED BY EVIDENCE FROM ACTUAL  
EVENTS AND YEARS OF TEACHING

**INTUITIVE**  
PRACTICAL, EASY-TO-LEARN  
INFORMATION THAT MAKES SENSE

# DEFENSIVE SHOOTING

## FUNDAMENTALS

**LEVEL 2**

**Training For  
Real-Life Scenarios**



[www.USCCA.COM](http://www.USCCA.COM)

**ROB PINCUS**

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# PRAISE FOR ROB PINCUS

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“Rob takes his years of experience and research in reality-based training and transfers that to his teaching methodology. He explains and demonstrates practical range drills that train his students to safely react to real life-threatening situations.”

— **John T. Meyer Jr., President / Founder, Team One Network**

“Rob’s relentless pursuit of a better way and willingness to evolve makes him a force multiplier in defensive firearms training.”

— **Don Edwards, Greenline Tactical /  
MSG (Ret) US Army Special Forces**

“Rob has the unique ability to teach students skills that they truly learn ... meaning that he doesn’t want you to learn something just to get it right in class. He teaches in a way so that you understand the reason why you are reacting in a certain way and why you use a certain skillset. His teaching method ensures that you will be able to utilize these skills whether ... a week or years later.”

— **Chuck Usina, Owner, Ancient City Shooting Range**

“The world is a dangerous place. Rob Pincus prepares you to protect yourself and your loved ones like no other. Now arm yourself with his new book. Rob is the renowned expert in self-defense. He teaches you how to make quick, effective, legally appropriate decisions in life-and-death situations.”

— **Alan Gottlieb, Founder, Second Amendment Foundation**

“Gun Fighting is the American Martial Art, and Rob Pincus is the irrefutable “Grand Master” ... if we measure the black-belt Grand Master by his skill, by his number of students or by his impact and/or leadership in the field, then in any and all of these areas, Rob Pincus measures up to the standards.”

— **Dave Grossman, Lt. Col. (Ret) US Army /  
Author of On Killing and On Combat**

“Rob is one of the few people in the training world who actually allows his defensive shooting program to evolve as new information, equipment and teaching methods become available. This new book contains his best and most up-to-date information to help you develop your own defensive skills. What’s more, he’s one of the few real teachers in the business, able to explain even complex topics so that anyone can understand them.”

— **Grant Cunningham,  
Author / Instructor / Host of Training Talk**

“Rob Pincus is dedicated to delivering professional and safe training using the most current data and trends. His courses are constantly being evaluated and updated to deliver maximum training impact for students. He is an incredibly competent and dynamic instructor.”

— **Scott Watson, Developer, Jedburgh Target Systems**

“It’s wise to invest some time in learning how to protect yourself in situations in which you don’t have sufficient warning to unleash that picture-perfect side kick or assume that Weaver stance, get proper sight alignment and squeeze off a perfectly aimed shot. If this no-nonsense approach to self-defense strikes a chord with you, Rob Pincus should be your next stop on the road to being a complete martial artist.”

— **Robert Young, Editor, Black Belt Magazine**

“Rob Pincus has been a major influence not just on my belief and approach to firearms but also my approach to teaching. He has a unique attention to detail that is missing in this industry. You’d be hard-pressed to find someone who hasn’t been directly or indirectly influenced by Rob and his teaching.”

— **Aaron Jannetti, Author, How to Survive an Active Killer**





# PREFACE

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Putting together a book about firearms training involves a tremendous amount of work. While the end result is almost always a wonder to behold, it's the getting there that's messy: You need writers, designers, project managers, editors, photographers, subject matter experts, copy editors, proofreaders and coffee runners all working together to create something worthy. (OK, the latter isn't required, but it's certainly recommended.) When you consider what's at stake for those reading a book about the defensive use of firearms, you'll realize just how important that "putting together" really is.

But here's the thing: You can't put together a book worthy of ending up in the hands of hundreds of thousands of responsibly armed Americans all across the country if you don't start out with truly worthwhile content.

*Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 2* takes its roots from noted firearms trainer and personal defense educator Rob Pincus' proven training methodology. His Intuitive Defensive Shooting Program, the background of which Rob lays out in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*, aims to help individuals "be more efficient in the context of dynamic critical incidents."

In *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*, this book's precursor, Rob tailors each chapter to provide you with the most crucial information you'll need to give you the best possible chance of surviving a critical incident. He covers everything from the development of his Intuitive Defensive Shooting Program to the fundamentals of firearms safety, grip, stance and trigger control to using what your body does naturally to your advantage when things go south. He introduces you to the "Warrior Expert" mindset, walks you through the balance of speed and precision, and concludes with several helpful defensive drills, including the "Volume of Fire Drill" and the "Push Your Limits Drill."

In *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 2*, Rob takes everything up a notch.

In Chapter 1, Rob explains how hope is not a strategy, and how realistic training is imperative to developing a clear picture of your abilities.

In Chapter 3, Rob provides an in-depth look at efficiency and tells you why it's so crucial to your firearms training and skill development.

Rob discusses defense inside the home in Chapters 8 and 9, covering pertinent topics such as cover and concealment, storing and staging firearms, and the importance of employing that "warrior mindset" when it comes to dealing with active threats.

He wraps things up with a series of Intuitive Defensive Shooting drills in Chapter 13, which, he says, "increase in skill requirement and intensity" from those presented in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*. I think you'll especially love the "Figure 8 Drill."

Just as with Pincus' first book, *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 2* brings to light our shared mission of educating and training responsibly armed Americans and, ultimately, saving lives through the efficient — and judicious — use of firearms in self-defense.

I'll leave you now to another great read from Rob Pincus and his closing promise from *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*, which couldn't be more true: "With the skills you'll develop [in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 2*] and the dedication you have for the responsibly armed lifestyle, you will no doubt find yourself more prepared to survive and prevail even under the most dangerous of circumstances."



Tim Schmidt  
President & Founder, USCCA







# INTRODUCTION

## PROTECT WHAT YOU LOVE.

**T**his simple sentence is both a call to action and an explanation for the actions you take. The desire to be able to protect what you love is what justifies reading this book. It explains your interest in owning defensive firearms, and it should be the reason behind the time you spend developing your skills. What do you *love*? Your family? Your friends? Your job? Your hobbies? Yourself? All of those could be valid answers.

For a long time, we've taught soldiers and police officers to fight through injury and/or fear by thinking about what they want to go home to or what they want to survive for. This is meant to push them through a fight when they might think they have been defeated and can't go on. For the average person, getting motivated in the middle of a fight may be far too late. Armed professionals presumably already have the equipment and the training *before* they willingly go into conflict. As everyday people, we try to avoid conflict whenever possible, and far too many people live in the denial of the possibility of needing to fight for their lives. Many people need to be motivated just to take that reality seriously. They need motivation to spend the time, money and effort on equipment, training and practice to be prepared for that (thankfully) unlikely event that could end their lives if they are not prepared. I offer "Protect What You Love" as a concept to inspire people to take those steps to be more prepared, to live their lives in a way that makes it less likely that they could lose the opportunities that await them in their futures or be lost as assets to those who love them.

If you are reading this book, you are already showing that you take your need to prepare seriously. Should you find yourself getting complacent or negligent in your responsibility to be prepared to defend yourself, revisit this concept. When people ask you why you are so vigilant or dedicated to preparation for the rare moments in modern life when you are faced with a lethal threat and need a means to protect yourself efficiently, offer them this concept. Perhaps you will motivate them to be better prepared as well. While the motivation alone isn't enough, it is a necessary starting point. This book is part of the continuing process that comes afterwards.

If you own a firearm for defensive purposes, it is vital that you do so responsibly. You must educate yourself not only in how to

shoot it but also in how to properly carry or stage it and prepare yourself for its use (and the aftermath of that use) in a worst-case scenario. This book is specifically intended to help you meet your responsibility in these regards. This volume not only expands on many of the topics covered in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1* but also includes new areas of information that are incredibly important to anyone who would be responsibly armed.

This book is aimed at making you a more informed and better prepared defensive gun owner. Topics such as weak-handed shooting and malfunction clearing add important skills to your repertoire. It is important to understand the training concepts and fundamental principles that are contained herein.

As I have evolved as a teacher, I have realized that "advanced" students usually don't need to learn more things as much as they need to learn more about the things they already know. The Warrior Expert Theory that was covered in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1* describes how your training can prepare you to respond more efficiently through the power of recognition. This book dives deeper into the concepts of expertise and efficiency in the expectation that a better understanding of them will sharpen the focus of your training and skill development. Other chapters covering plausibility and prioritization take a more in-depth look at why you should be training for certain types of events more than others and why you should focus more on certain skills than others.

This volume starts out with a discussion of learning opportunities. If you've made it this far, you are probably developing a bit of a passion for training. You might be in a phase where you really enjoy practicing and seeing your skills improve. That first chapter is, in some ways, a warning to not become a hobbyist in regard to your activities with defensive firearms. It is all too easy to forget the concept of the range being a racetrack. Don't get too excited about the next new technique or piece of gear. Don't get hung up on becoming a better shooter in a marksmanship sense. Stay focused on your true goal: to be better prepared to defend yourself and *protect what you love*. This book offers many learning opportunities. I hope that it is a valuable part of your preparation.



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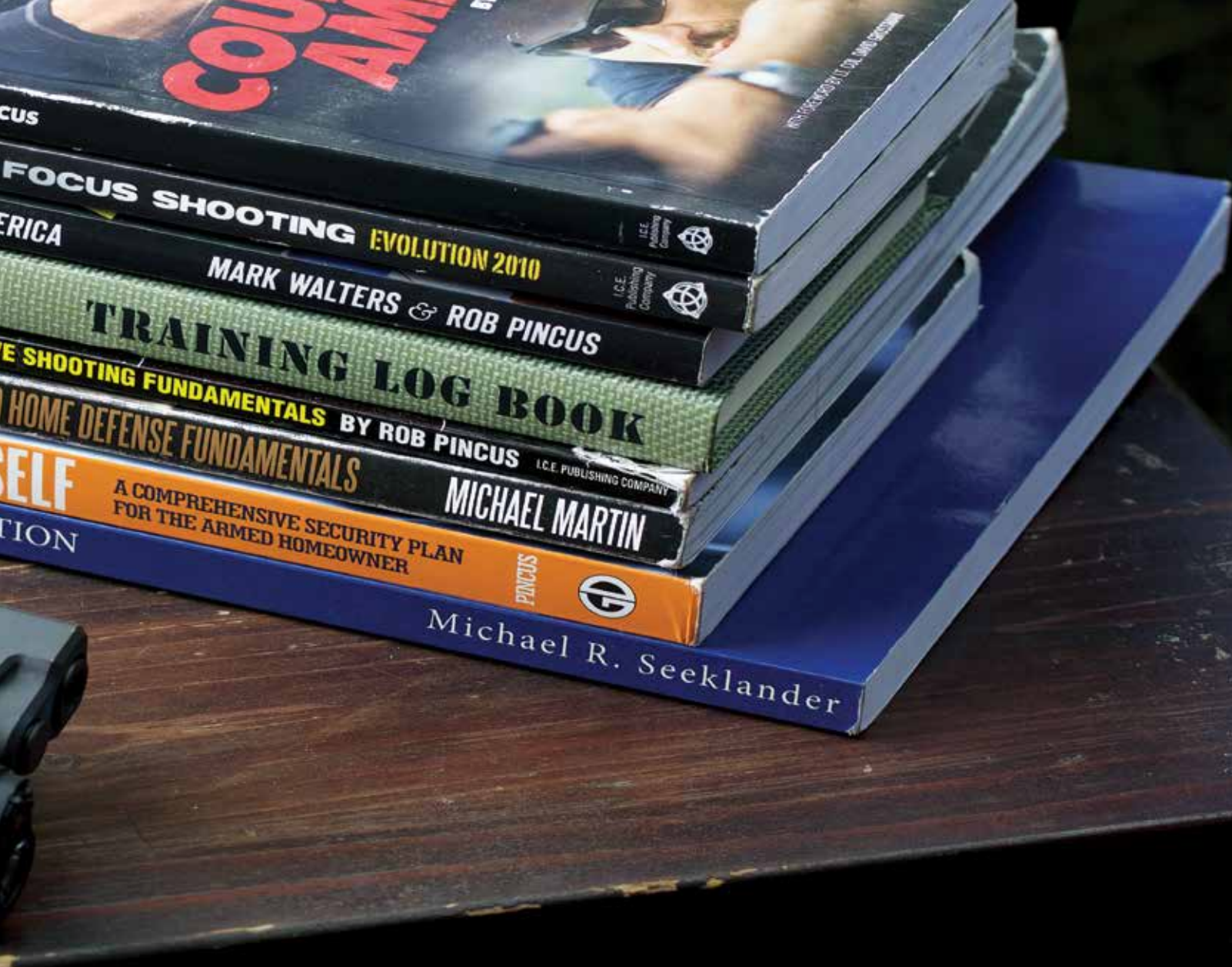
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CHAPTER ONE

# LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES





**A**lan Brosnan, founder of Tactical Energetic Entry Systems, once said during a class that, if you fired 1,000 rounds at a target and put 999 of them in the X-ring, you only had one opportunity to learn that day. The fact is that you could have just gotten lucky 999 times. If you can figure out why the one miss didn't hit where you intended it to, then you can improve your shooting.

If you shoot at a comfortable pace and make all of your hits during training, you might not be getting an accurate idea of your personal balance of speed and precision. Worse than that, you might not be shooting as efficiently as you could be. This is actually one of the most common problems I see with experienced shooters who take a Combat Focus Shooting course.

After immersion in the Combat Focus Shooting System for almost a year as an instructor at The Valhalla Center, Brad Schuppan shared a drill with me that allowed us to encourage students to push their limits and see just how fast they could get combat-accurate hits. The application in Combat Focus is a little different, as we address all aspects of shooting and usually end up making the point that students can get hits faster than they think they can. This drill is among those described toward the end of *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*, listed as the "Push Your Limits Drill."

As also mentioned in the *Level 1* book, when you're trying to get the best lap time on a driving track and you hear your tires squeal, you know you're losing traction, which means you're being inefficient. The next time through that corner, you have to do one of two things: Change your line (the path you take through the corner and the timing of your braking and acceleration) or slow down. Eventually, you'll find the best line and you'll have no option but to slow down when you start squealing.

Think of your grip, stance, trigger control and other technique factors as "the line." If you have the fundamentals right



and you are still squealing the tires, you need to slow down, but if you never hear the tires squeal, you'll never know how fast your lap times could be.

Try to make your training realistic and varied. Realistic training is not simply an objective statement; just because you use reactive or three-dimensional targets or train in a shoot house of some kind does not mean that your training is actually realistic.

You must try to make your training fit the context of your personal and specific real-world situations as often as possible. If you spend a significant amount of every day seated or driving and you've never practiced seated shooting, you're missing a huge opportunity to train realistically. Similarly, if you carry a small revolver but find a large semi-auto easier and more fun to shoot during training, you're fundamentally preventing that training from being as realistic as possible.

Realistic training also means using your gear in a way that reflects how you will actually have it with you when you are out in the real world. If you keep a spare magazine in your coat pocket when you carry a defensive gun but always practice with three spare magazines on your belt, your training might be very good, but it's not even close to as real as it could be.

If you carry your gun in a fanny pack or a purse for daily defensive use but train from a holster for convenience or, even worse, "because everyone else does," that leaves a huge discrepancy between your range work and your real defensive training needs.

While training, you don't just need to make those drills as realistic as possible. You need to push your limits. When you are shooting in a realistic context, see just how fast you can go.

There are almost as many theories about learning as there are firearms training schools. I subscribe strongly to the idea that we learn from failures, and I think that this is especially true when it comes to confidence issues. Later, I will explain how your con-





■ Defensive shooting isn't like a duel. Training to draw and shoot on a specific signal you expect to be given can create overconfidence.

fidence in your ability directly affects your execution of complex motor skills. If you do not have an accurate idea of your capabilities, you cannot accurately judge how hard you should try in any given circumstance or what you can reasonably expect of yourself. Similarly, misunderstanding your defensive shooting ability can cause hesitation that gets you killed.

Conversely, overconfidence about your defensive skills can lead you to shoot recklessly and inadvertently harm someone or miss your intended threat and get killed. Either way, a lack of appropriate confidence can be catastrophic. Remember, confidence comes from finding your limits.

You have probably heard of dopamine. Without getting more technical than we need to, dopamine is a chemical in the brain, the

“  
**YOU BECOME  
APPROPRIATELY  
CONFIDENT IN YOUR  
ABILITY THROUGH  
REALISTIC PRACTICE AND  
EVALUATION. BEING OVER-  
OR UNDER-CONFIDENT  
IN YOUR DEFENSIVE  
SHOOTING ABILITY CAN  
BE CATASTROPHIC.**


**ROB PINCUS**

”

level of which can vary based on the accuracy of your expectations. Dopamine levels are very closely tied to rewards, punishment, happiness and even euphoria. Some behavioral scientists break down all human activity as a quest for raising and maintaining dopamine levels. If you look at what is going on in the brain in regard to expectation (which is a product of being confident in an outcome), you'll find that dopamine levels rise when you expect something good to happen. If you are on the range and you press the trigger, expecting to see a hole appear in a desired target area and that hole does appear, the dopamine levels in your brain remain high; your expectation of something positive was met. This is a representation of skill-based maintenance of dopamine levels. By understanding your skill level, applying the right amount of deviation control and meeting your expectations in



“  
**THE BEST WAYS TO GET  
YOUR DOPAMINE LEVELS  
BACK UP, OF COURSE,  
ARE TO ADJUST YOUR  
EXPECTATIONS BACK TO  
A REALISTIC LEVEL AND  
RAISE YOUR APPLICATION  
OF SKILL TO MEET YOUR  
EXPECTATIONS.**  
”



“  
**HOPE IS NOT  
A METHOD.**  
GORDON R. SULLIVAN  
”

a training environment, you can literally keep yourself happy.

As you might expect, if you miss your shot, your dopamine levels will drop. When those levels drop, you are motivated to improve. In a very real way, your brain suddenly wants you to shoot better. Of course, if you get distracted or discouraged, your brain may get the dopamine levels back up in some other way. We see this all the time on the range. An off-hand comment, a self-deprecating joke or maybe even a rationalization about why you missed can each bring those dopamine levels back up. Even a positive comment from a well-meaning but misguided instructor can replace the lost neurotransmitter of happiness.

The best ways to get your dopamine levels back up, of course, are to adjust your expectations back to a realistic level and raise your application of skill to meet your expectations. Remember that we rationalize things only because they are not rational to begin with. Have you ever shot on one of those targets with outline drawings of internal organs on it? Have you ever shot at the high-center chest and missed low left but celebrated the fact that you hit the picture of some internal structure at which you weren't actually aiming? That, my friend, is a perfect example of rationalization.

Another potential training pitfall with regard to the neuroscience of learning is to shoot without expectations. If you simply

pull the trigger and hope that you'll get a hit, a miss will not have a dramatic effect on the dopamine levels in your brain. In fact, if you do get the hit, your dopamine levels will spike upward. In this way, you may be reinforcing a bad shooting habit; after all, if you aren't clearly applying the skill you need to actually expect a hit, you might have just gotten lucky.

This is the exact mechanism that casinos take advantage of to keep you handing money over to their slot machines. If you don't expect anything but get surprising rewards often enough, your brain will keep seeking out that surprising happiness. I think we can all agree that the randomness of slot machines is not something with which we'd want to trust our lives. As General Gordon R. Sullivan wrote in 1996, "Hope is not a method."

Don't fall into the trap of rationalizing a miss or shooting without expectations. Either will have an impressively negative effect on your ability to take advantage of learning opportunities and your brain's natural ability to motivate higher performance levels. Create learning opportunities on the range by finding and pushing your limits, having realistic expectations and holding yourself accountable for failures.





CHAPTER TWO

# RESPECTFUL IRREVERENCE





**W**hen any person, idea, technique, school, piece of gear, team or tactic is put on a pedestal, whatever purpose or goal it's supposed to be serving risks stopping progress. Conceptually, the tenets of "respectful irreverence" apply to any field of research or human endeavor.

You should constantly strive to improve your own abilities and levels of understanding. In the defensive and tactical worlds, that means becoming more dangerous to your enemies and better prepared to deal with violent conflicts. If, at any point, you decide that someone is at such a level that you blindly accept everything he or she says or does, you will inherently limit your ability to improve. History is full of revered experts and truths that turned out to be wrong. Acknowledging this simple fact should remind us that today's experts and truths might be just as vulnerable to improvement.

Do bear in mind that questioning those you perceive to be experts does not mean disrespecting them. In fact, if you look hard enough, you will probably find that your heroes challenged experts or previously held beliefs in order to develop their own conclusions and truths. This process is necessary for progress.

I don't think anyone in the training industry has less than outstanding intentions. As instructors, however, we are all limited by our exposure to ideas and our ability to process them. We are limited by the type of students with whom we have worked, the facilities at which we've taught and the systems in which we operate. Come to think of it, someone once said that modern third-year college physics majors know more about the relationship between matter and energy than Albert Einstein did when he wrote the Theory of Relativity that de-

scribes it.

In a perfect world, students will eventually outshine their instructors. I know that I've learned a lot from students and their feedback; student questions have forced me to examine my own teachings more closely and sometimes change those teachings for the better. Occasionally, feedback from students can turn an idea on its ear and initiate a whole new approach to a problem or explanation for a solution. Keep in mind that just because some technique, piece of gear or training method has been used successfully does not mean that it is unquestionable. History is full of examples of "best ways" that were bested through innovation, experimentation and critical thinking.

I've spent a lot of time over the last few years engaged in instructor development for civilian, military and law enforcement personnel. I want to take this opportunity to impart some of the important tenets I share during such courses that I think benefit us in the classroom and in our approach to training.

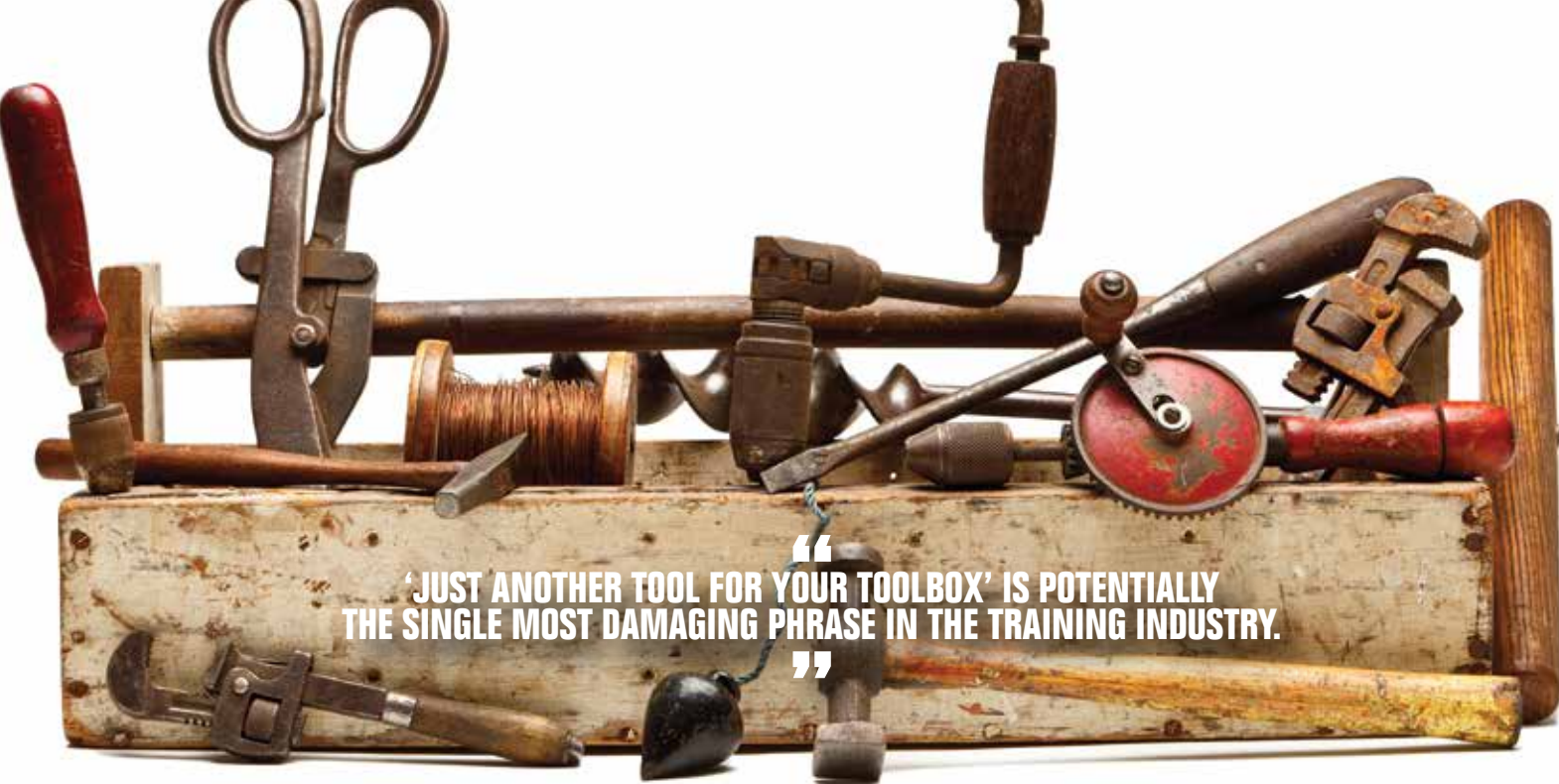
## **SUCCESS BREEDS COMPLACENCY**

We learn from mistakes and improve through failure. If you're not careful, success can breed complacency and pride. While you should certainly celebrate your victories, you need to spend much more time analyzing your losses in order to isolate the areas in which you need improvement. Training that revolves around ego-building and developing a "positive mental attitude" tends to become a choreographed series of feel-good drills and simplistic scenarios.

■ In this modern age of online learning and access to almost a limitless quantity of information, it is imperative to keep in mind that just because someone said it doesn't make it so. Ask questions, seek out competent curriculum and do your best to never stop learning. As soon as you think you "know enough," that's when your skills are most likely to atrophy.







## AVOID ABSOLUTES

Never say “never.” Skepticism is an important trait in anyone seeking to improve on an existing system. Without a fair dose of skepticism, one is likely to jump on the first bandwagon that passes by. Once aboard, a failure to think critically can lead to being taken for the proverbial “ride.” One of the first indications of a need for questions is an absolute. If someone says “always” or “never,” it is your responsibility to find the exception. By identifying the exception, you will improve the system and be able to better prepare. If the exception doesn’t exist, look again. Also be open to accepting it (and adjusting appropriately) if someone else finds it.

## ASK (AND ANSWER) THE ‘WHY?’ QUESTIONS

“Just another tool for your toolbox” is potentially the single most damaging phrase in the training industry. Instructors owe their students more of an explanation for investing time and effort (let alone money) in a technique, tactic or principle than to just offer that it is something that might work for them. Very few instructors use this phrase out of ignorance. Quite simply, many use it to avoid confrontations with “Type A” students who might

want to argue based on previous training. Some use it out of their own complacency simply because it’s never been questioned, and some use it because they truly believe that the tactic in question really is just another tool.

I believe a student deserves a detailed explanation as to why the instructor is taking the time to teach any given skill or concept. Intellectual comfort with an idea is vital to efficient learning.

If the answer to a “Why?” question is, “Because that’s how we/the team/some other team/this school/whoever does it,” I suggest taking a long, hard, deep breath and examining the rest of the course with extreme skepticism. Dogma has no place in this arena. My staff instructors operate under threat of termination if they ever offer this type of answer to a student.

An instructor should always teach what he or she truly believes to be the best option for any given situation and should be ready, willing and able to explain why he or she believes as he or she does. An instructor who sidesteps a “Why?” question with a subjective answer or with false humility (“a way, not *the* way” or some such platitude) is abandoning his or her responsibility as an educator.



■ All instruction should be tailored to the student's reality as much as possible. This isn't about competition shooting or "plinking" at the local county range. This is about saving lives and how to efficiently and effectively react to mortal danger.

## Threats Within Two A

- If contact with a threat is imminent you must Clear yourself from the immediate attack as a first step.
- Establish some Control over the attacker/situation.
- Counter the threat's attack as appropriate, possibly with your firearm.

Module 6: Developing Defensive Shooting Skills



“  
**I BELIEVE A STUDENT DESERVES A DETAILED EXPLANATION AS TO WHY THE INSTRUCTOR IS TAKING THE TIME TO TEACH ANY GIVEN SKILL OR CONCEPT. INTELLECTUAL COMFORT WITH AN IDEA IS VITAL TO EFFICIENT LEARNING.**  
”

Of course, as I often remind my students and myself, an instructor may be wrong. He may later find out that he was wrong about something, or he may find out why he thought he was right. I've realized I was wrong and have changed my mind many times in the past. That doesn't stop me from passionately sharing what I believe to be the best information on any given day for any given student.

### **CONTEXT DICTATES CURRICULUM**

Students should be taught skills that will work in the contexts in which they are likely to need them. Spouting content blindly, without regard for the realities of the students, is simply lecturing, not teaching.

A course outline should be open to adjustment to accommodate student situations, questions, equipment and abilities. I always say that I know about 95 percent of what I'm going to teach at the start of any given course, while the last 5 percent comes from student interactions and is often some very important content.

If you follow these principles as often as possible and look for instructors who do the same, you should be able to get more out of the time and effort you devote to training. Avoiding complacency and absolutes, answering the “Why?” questions and allowing context to influence curriculum whenever you can may not be easy. It might bruise some egos (maybe even yours). If the attitudes of those involved are properly aimed at the goal of improving — without regard for personal preferences — the irreverence does not have to be disrespectful. We should all be standing on the shoulders of the giants who have come before us in the training industry, enabling us to see farther and reach higher than they did. If, instead, we kneel at the feet of those giants — be they people, schools or organizations — we will fail to build on what they have established and we will stagnate.

Honor the individual; challenge the material.



CHAPTER THREE

# EXPERTISE









**G**etting beyond the mystical nature of concepts like a “sixth sense” and “gut feelings” empowers us to focus on not only *what* we should be training but also *how* we should be training. If you are an armed professional or if you are choosing to take your personal defense or that of those you care about seriously, you need to become a “warrior expert” (as discussed in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*). Start building your patterns of response to a plausible attack now. Create templates in your head that resemble plausible critical incidents you might encounter. When you are shooting, don’t just shoot; picture yourself solving a deadly problem.

One very simple yet very effective tactic is as follows: Sit in your home and think about where you keep your guns, where an armed home invader would make entry and where your safe room is (if you have one). In the case that you are able to secure your family in a safe room and access your firearm, it should be pretty easy to predict the exact angles, distances, cover, concealment and backstops involved in the most plausible shooting situations.

Using this visualization exercise, you can easily recreate your most likely shooting situations on any range without the

need to build (or even access) a shoot house. By doing so, you get to develop rock-solid responses to a wide array of possible dynamic critical incidents very efficiently, thus increasing your home-defense savvy and your warrior expertise. The more information and experience you can store in your brain through realistic training, practical thought and tactical problem-solving, the closer you are to becoming a warrior expert.

Attending a class, hanging a certificate on the wall or reading a book doesn’t make you a warrior, and surviving a critical incident doesn’t make you a warrior expert. In fact, because of differences in the way the brain forms memories under critical stress, the latter may not help at all.

In 2007, I took a class through the University of Arizona on the concept of consciousness. The lead professor was a noted expert in the areas of consciousness and cognition. If one thing became clear through taking that course, it was that what we normally refer to as the “subconscious” (or the thoughts, decisions and activities that occur but are not necessarily perceived) is at least as important to our survival as the cognitive thought processes we are able to articulate. These pre-cognitive decisions are not necessarily limited to



instinctive reactions but can include learned responses that may be more effective.

In his book *In the Theater of Consciousness* (1997), Professor Bernard J. Baars offers this in regard to the learned problem-solving functions of our unconscious:

“Consciousness of a charging bull evokes a host of unconscious processes — those that allow you to run without having to think, routines that search for the right words to yell for help, and some that bring in knowledge from potentially anywhere in the brain to help make sense of it all.”

He continues, “If you only had time to think while running from the charging bull, you would no doubt be able to come up with some good ideas. The trouble is, of course, that you have no time to think. Unless you have habitual routines for dealing with charging bovines, you are fated to use whatever unconscious skills you might have learned from dodging traffic and the like. But automobiles do not become enraged and try to follow you up the sidewalk...”

Becoming a warrior expert is a constant process of gaining, evaluating and using information to form the appropriate

■ If you knew weeks ahead of time that you would face a charging bull, you would probably come up with a great plan and execute your techniques perfectly.

habitual routines that can be executed on demand without having to think about them.

It should go without saying that I hold the capabilities of our military and law enforcement special operations teams in high regard. There is no more highly trained group of dedicated professionals of which I am aware. That said, I have seen members of every tactical team that

I have trained (including some of the best in the world) make some big mistakes.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, I've seen people with no experience who were very dangerous and skilled individuals with excellent judgment. It has been these observations that have led to my skepticism.

Judging an individual's performance in terms of capability and dedication to improvement is going to be a much more accurate way to evaluate that person than by reading through his or her resume.

Being a warrior expert is not about belonging to a club, shooting a certain type of gun or graduating from a specific school. Remember too that credentials do not always equate to ability.

It is also important to acknowledge that “experts” are not always right and certainly don’t always know everything. In fact, this book exists because of a lack of knowledge and ability on my part when I started writing books about the Combat Focus Shooting Program and revised what I was sure I *did* know through five printings. It finally got to the point where I had learned so much more and had changed my mind about enough things (especially in the drills area) that a completely new edition was warranted. Keep in mind that this was in regard to my own program! The bottom line is that we can never presume to know it all, even if we develop expertise.

There is an organization you can find on the internet called The Edge Foundation. Among other things, The Edge poses an annual question to some of the greatest minds on the planet. In 2008, this question was, “What have you changed your mind about?” Go to their website and read some of the responses. You might recognize some of the names on the list, though you likely won’t recognize most of them (nor will you likely have much interest in the topics they are covering). The important thing here is the process by which they came to new realizations that replaced their old opinions and beliefs. Atop all else, the simple openness to being wrong, and the humility to admit it, is a big lesson to be learned by reading through those responses.



“  
**WHAT HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR  
MIND ABOUT?**  
”

# AN EVOLVING MINDSET: WHAT'S CHANGED?

## ...IN THE LAST 25 YEARS?

**The value of the 1911 as a defensive tool.** Like many people, I used to believe that the 1911 was the best defensive firearm on Earth. While there may have been a time when that was true, that time is not now — and hasn't been for a long time. Learn more about the importance of efficiently training with your defensive firearm in Chapter Four.

**The validity of training to shoot with both arms at extension.** I learned to shoot in a traditional bladed stance and believed in its efficacy for a long time. Of course, on the range and in certain double-tap-driven gun games, it works very well. In the context of dynamic defensive shooting situations, full extension of both arms and engagement of both shoulders toward the threat is far superior. Learn more about this in Chapter Eight of *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*.

## ...IN THE LAST 20 YEARS?

**“THE” Safety Rules.** After an incident in the early 2000s in which one student shot his friend in a hotel room while practicing after a day of training at a school in Arizona, I realized that we were doing a great disservice to our students and the gun-owning community in general if, as leaders, all we did after every incident or tragedy was quote a set of rules. Never mind that the individual or individuals involved were almost certainly familiar with those rules; that didn't prevent the incident, did it? This is when I began thinking about safety as a concept and stepping away from all the sets of traditional rules. See Chapter One of *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1* for more information.

## ...IN THE LAST 15 YEARS?

**The value of dry-fire practice.** Dry-fire practice used to be a staple of the training community's recommendations to develop defensive shooting skills. Upon further thought and observation, the high-level trigger control that can be developed during monotonous hours of isolated dry-fire isn't extremely important to the vast majority of plausible defensive shooting situations. There are plenty of important skills you can build with a dry gun in your own home: presentation from the holster from concealment or gun manipulations in unorthodox positions immediately jump to mind. Repeatedly pulling the trigger

without recoil or accountability for shot placement isn't one of those skills.

**The proper training method for multiple-target engagement.** I used to practice and teach engaging multiple threats without regard for the importance of assessing the environment between them. Turn to Chapter Thirteen to discover how I approach multiple-target engagement now.

**The meaningfulness of objective measures of ability.** The more I've thought about them, the more I truly believe that so-called “standards” in training get in the way of students reaching their potential at the practical high end or gun owners even beginning their training at the low end. Someone makes up all of the scoring systems, qualification tests or competency times; they are subjective and related to the agenda of the creator. Are these measurements trying to push the top 5 percent to be better or make sure that only the bottom 5 percent will fail? A true coach wants to push each individual to his or her potential and encourage those new to the endeavor to achieve what they can.

## ...IN THE LAST 10 YEARS?

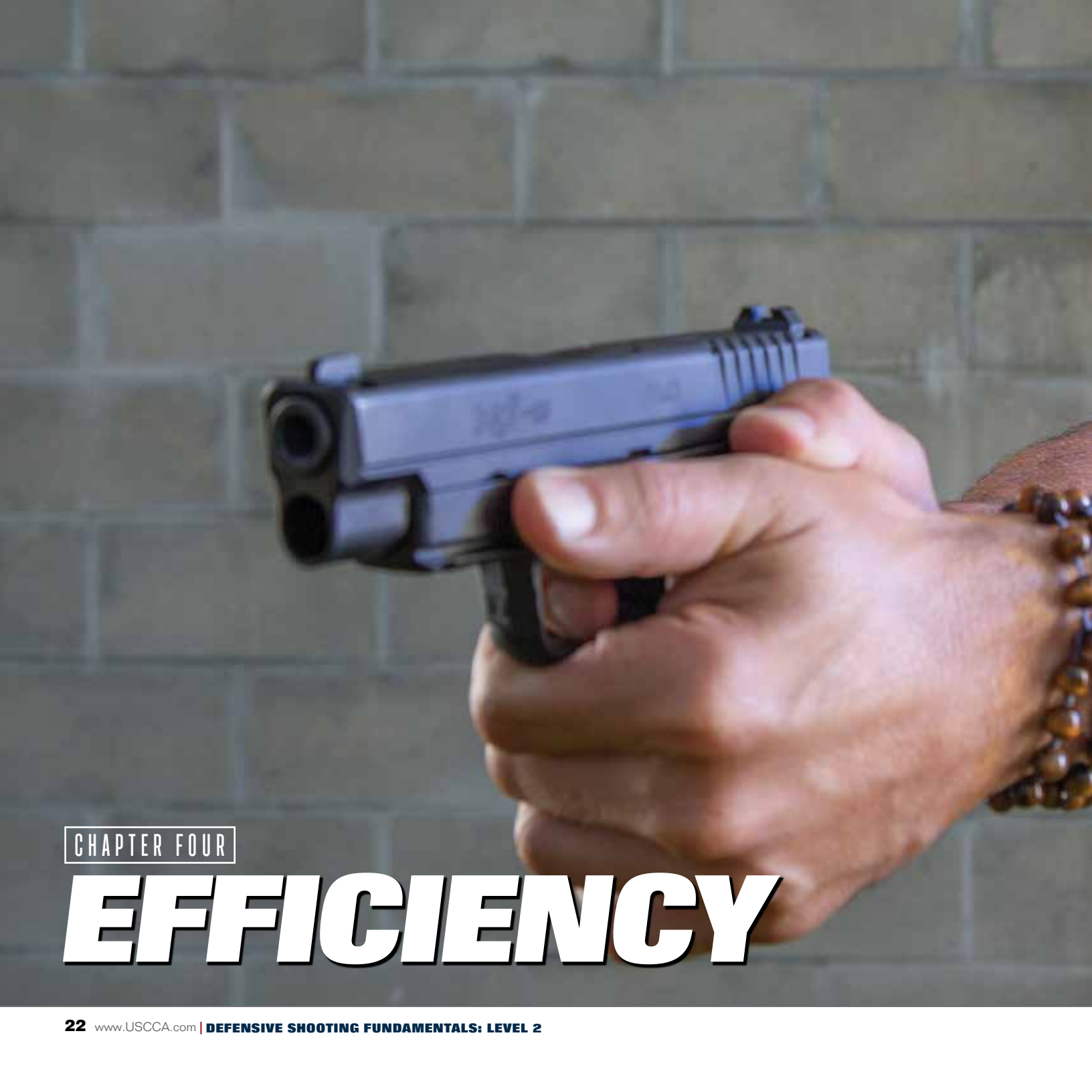
**The value of the “Cognitive Drill” concept.** Counter-ambush training methodology requires the collection and processing of information immediately prior to, and concurrently with, the execution of complex motor skills. The more I see very accomplished shooters fail to apply their skills when thought processes are necessary, the more I am convinced that cognitive drills should be standard in defensive training. Learn more about these drills in Chapter Thirteen.

**The benefits of 9mm over .40 S&W.** I jumped onto the .40 S&W bandwagon in the mid 1990s. I bought a Glock 23 and was sure I'd found the perfect balance of capacity, power and shootability. I was wrong. In time, I did more research and experimentation and have come to realize that the 9mm is the best choice for personal-defense ammunition.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Don't be afraid to admit when you learn something better. Equally importantly, don't stop looking for opportunities to do so by challenging your current beliefs and preferences.

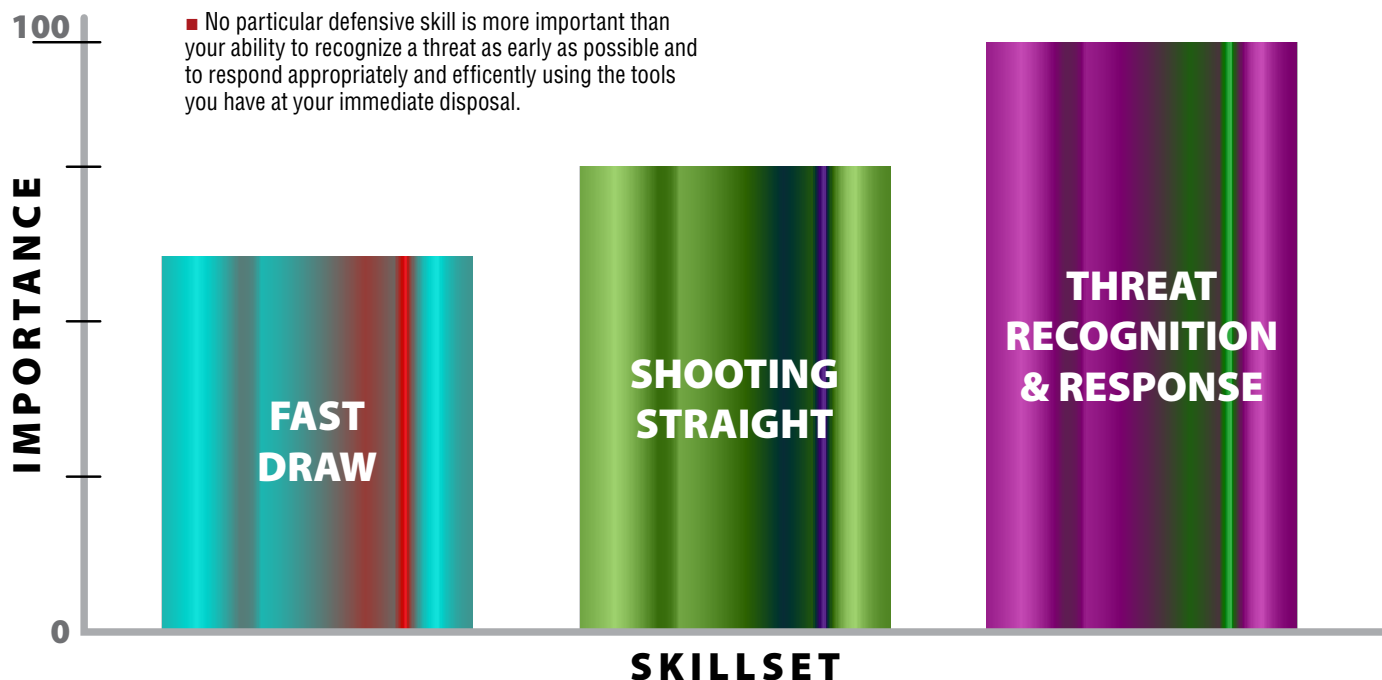




CHAPTER FOUR

# ***EFFICIENCY***





If you ever have to engage in the use of tactical skills to survive a critical incident, you'll want to do so as efficiently as you can. The more you've thought about using those skills in a realistic way, the faster you'll respond and the faster you'll be safe.

You'll want to *know* how to respond rather than have to figure it out in a critical moment. The importance of training in a realistic way — in as realistic an environment as possible, preferably with interactive and reactive targets and good force-on-force role players — cannot be overstated. Remember, you are supposed to be practicing for application of defensive shooting skills in the context of a real-world event, not just performing your skills in isolation.

I often mention that, to me, the range is a racetrack for firearms. Just as you can use lap time to become a better driver, get to know your car better and practice your ability to respond to emergency situations that you might plausibly find on the street, you can do the same thing at the shooting range with your firearm. Don't get distracted by chasing extreme performance in isolation or repeating the exact same drills over and over again, with nothing more important than a better score on the line.

At the very least, forgetting that the range is like a racetrack will give you overconfidence in your own ability. You'll start to

believe that you'll be unrealistically skilled in a fight because you've forgotten that the range drills aren't replicating fighting conditions. Many people have made this mistake in cars and have paid a hefty price for pushing beyond their abilities to apply track-driving skills in the real world. Tragically, they sometimes injure or kill others in the process of their reckless driving.

At worst, you risk becoming so distracted by range performance that you change your equipment choices in ways that jeopardize your ability to use your gun in a defensive situation. You might choose a gun that has very tight tolerances, which reduces its reliability under real-world conditions. You might choose a gun with an unreasonably light or short trigger and have a negligent discharge when outside of controlled range conditions. You might add an accessory to your gun, such as a red-dot sight or a weapon-mounted light, that allows you to perform better under exaggerated lighting conditions, range conditions or distance to your target. You might even change your techniques and training in ways that make it less likely that you will perform well during a fight.

Never lose sight of what you're training to become an expert in — and that shouldn't simply be shooting. Although this book focuses primarily on efficient defensive shooting techniques, keep





in mind that shooting is only a small part of the solution to a critical incident. Before the formation of the Warrior Expert Theory, I would try to explain this reality to students with the following phrase:

*The athletic ability to draw fast and shoot straight is not nearly as important as the ability to recognize a threat as early as possible and respond appropriately and efficiently utilizing the environment, training and tools available.*

Of course, mastering the skills of Intuitive Defensive Shooting means learning to use your tools like an expert as well. For example, it's more efficient to use a gun without a separately operated manual safety in a defensive situation. Now, just to use a few common circumstances I've faced as a trainer in the past, that certainly doesn't mean that you can't be fast with a single-action automatic if you use it properly. It also certainly doesn't mean that you can't be efficient if your department has issued you a double-action pistol but has told you that

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”**

you have to carry it with the de-cocker in the “safe” position. In both cases, however, you could change the gear or the technique and be faster and more efficient.

Efficiency is imperative to maximizing your skill level under any given set of circumstances, and combative skills are no exception. Moreover, there exists clinical evidence that practicing makes us physiologically and cognitively more efficient. In 1992, Richard Haier and colleagues at the University of California, Irvine conducted a

study which revealed reduced brain function during complex decision-making combined with consistent fine-motor-skill execution, coinciding with increased skill performance after practice. In their controlled study, brain imaging revealed that subjects' brains used more energy to complete the required skills at objectively lower levels before learning and practice took place. After learning and practice, higher skill levels were demonstrated, with significantly lowered energy expenses in subjects' brains.

If you think about the conditions of an actual defensive situ-





ation, the less brainpower you need to use to complete the complex set of responses that you may need to survive, the better off you are.

As Walt Rauch points out in *Real World Survival* (1998), “The most important thing in training and practice is to keep it simple. This will give you the proficiency to stay alive.”

Increasing efficiency means achieving your goal in less time and with less effort and expense of energy. Consistent training in the most efficient techniques available means increasing repetition, which will certainly make it easier for you to perform the skills on demand during a dynamic critical incident. While that last part is obvious, the high value that comes from consistency in techniques (such as performing the maximum number of skills in the high compressed ready position or always getting the slide into battery using the overhand technique) is sometimes overlooked.

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WALT RAUCH,  
*REAL WORLD SURVIVAL* (1998)

”

## A CLOSER LOOK AT CONSISTENCY

Consistency means you have fewer things to learn and fewer things to practice. Using one type of gun means one trigger, one magazine release and one grip shape to get used to. You also want to be consistent in your planned responses and your tactics. Consistency also means fewer choices, and having fewer choices means acting faster.

Psychologists William Hick and Ray Hyman did extensive research on human reaction time and decision-making during the 1950s. Their research codified a generally intuitive concept: The more choices we have and the more things we have to pay attention to, the slower our reaction time and responses will be. What became known as the Hick-Hyman Law describes the way humans sift through choices: in a logarithmic, rather than linear, process. What that means is that you don’t really have to choose between all of the possible responses when you are faced with a decision.

For example, picture yourself seated in a restaurant, with a glass of water and a glass of wine in front of you and each of your tablemates. In a physical sense — in theory — you could take a drink from any of the glasses on the table were you to become thirsty; in practice, however, your brain eliminates the option of drinking from other people's glasses and limits your perceived decision to choosing between your wine and your water. This is an important concept to grasp.

Without such a simple example, one might be led to intuitively dismiss the Hick-Hyman Law as an esoteric concept without any practical relevance. With an understanding of the importance of categorizing responses, we can steer our training toward greater consistency within categories and constructively limit our overall options.

The Hick-Hyman Law describes why having only one consistent presentation option for a given category of responses (such as while seated or while wearing a jacket) is so powerful in terms of increasing efficiency. The one-option approach allows you to form a stimulus-response pattern in your brain so that, when a situation or stimulus is encountered, your brain doesn't have to sift through options or improvise a response.

This is why I usually roll my eyes when I hear of people talking about learning “another tool for the toolbox.” When it comes to a specific problem in a specific situation, you don't really benefit from multiple options for solving it. Some individuals might mean that they need a collection of specific tools for a related collection of potential problems when they use this phrase. If that is the case, I certainly agree ... but that's not the way I see most people using it.

## LET'S RIDE

In classes, I often make comparisons between driving and shooting and cars and guns. (For a broader overview of this topic, reference *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*.)

In today's world, most active people need to drive a car every day to achieve their goals. You drive to get to and from work, you drive to transport your kids to school or other activities, you use your vehicle to run errands or move supplies, and the list goes on and on. Most people choose practical vehicles that work for them under a wide variety of conditions: weather, traffic patterns, road surfaces, etc.

When you first get into a car, you make sure that you can obtain consistent engagement with the steering wheel and that you have a comfortable seat position and properly adjusted mirrors. In short, you become familiar with your vehicle's operation and

capabilities. So far, everything about your daily driver and your defensive gun should be very comparable. There is a big difference for most gun owners though: You need to use your car every day and you (thankfully) almost never need to use your gun. This difference is the source of significant deviation from what are probably the best choices for most people when it comes to selecting defensive firearms and developing their defensive shooting skills.

Think of the range as a racetrack. If you were buying a car for a racetrack and trying to win races, you would probably have a very different type of car than you do now. You would likely set it up differently and drive it very differently if you only had to drive on the track — under controlled conditions and without regard for things like navigation, road hazards, speed limits and oncoming traffic when you are taking a left-hand curve. It would be a track car and not too much good for anything else.

In a similar sense, far too many people buy guns and develop their skills for the range and not for the real world. They sometimes let meaningless performance advantages on the range outweigh reliability and efficiency during a fight. They focus on the isolated performance of minute details of their own skills in overly narrow and predictable circumstances instead of being able to apply their skills under a wide variety of chaotic circumstances.

Imagine a champion Formula One driver in his open-wheeled track car employing the same style of driving he uses in a race while trying to get his kids to school and supply his house with groceries. Now imagine him in rush-hour traffic during a light snowfall or making his way through a construction zone in the middle of the summer on a stretch of gravel. That's what I see when someone is standing on the range with an overly customized pistol, running a timer drill over and over and trying to shave a 10<sup>th</sup> or two off his or her best run. A defensive shooter should focus less on his or her “best lap time” with a specialty tool and more on being prepared to respond to changing conditions with a solid daily driver.

There are some very specific ways that you can think about comparing your car (and the way you use it) to your defensive firearm:

1. In your car, you make sure that you can obtain consistent engagement with the steering wheel and that you have a comfortable seat position and properly adjusted mirrors. With your defensive handgun, you must ensure that you can operate all the levers and buttons efficiently with your strong hand only. This is a



significant part of your gun fitting your hand. Just like your car's seat, mirrors and steering wheel, some guns have factory-facilitated adjustments that can be made to their grips, such as interchangeable back straps. Some can be altered with aftermarket modifications, like extended magazine releases or contouring, which can dramatically affect your ability to meet this goal.

**2.** When you drive, you vary the amount of pressure that you use on your gas pedal under different conditions. At some times, it would be reckless to slam the gas pedal down to the floor and send all possible power to your tires. At other times, such as merging into fast-moving highway traffic, it is entirely appropriate to “floor it.”

With your gun, your trigger is a gas pedal. Sometimes, you will be pressing the trigger very slowly to control the gun as much as possible, and other times you will barely be noticing the trigger press as you run through a rapid string of fire. This analogy is best understood if you've ever owned a rear-wheel-drive car with a lot of horsepower: You control a lot of power with that gas pedal, and it is transferred to the ground through a relatively small

amount of rubber. A gun is a very powerful tool, and the amount of deviation allowed in a defensive shooting can be very small. Just as you use pressure on the pedal to control how much power is being pushed through the tires — especially on slippery or loose surfaces, such as snow or gravel — the slower you move the trigger, the more control you have over deviation.

**3.** When you drive your car, you probably don't stare at the speedometer and occasionally look up at your surroundings. In fact, it is probably quite the opposite. You likely don't pay much attention to your speedometer the majority of the time that you are driving but rather occasionally look down to confirm a specific speed when conditions change or when you have a reason to be more specific about how fast you're going (like entering a school zone or wondering whether a highway patrolman is sitting around that corner on the interstate). Generally, you just drive by feel, especially in areas with which you're familiar. You know by the feel of the car, the vibrations, the sounds, the passing scenery and other traffic that you are moving within an acceptable range of your intended speed.





Your sights are like your speedometer: You certainly shouldn't be staring at them, but you will definitely need to use them to be very precise about where your rounds are going. Defensive shooting generally occurs under conditions in which you can get hits by feel, using kinesthetic alignment based on basic shooting fundamentals and the knowledge you have of your own balance of speed and precision.

**4.** How often do you look at your brake pedal while you are driving? If you drive a car with a manual transmission, do you ever look at the clutch while you are driving? The magazine release button and your magazine well should be looked at about as often as those two pedals on your car. When you first learned to drive, you almost certainly looked under the dash a time or two. When you get a new car, or even when you are considering one for purchase, you might peek down there once or twice just to make sure everything's reasonable, but that'll be about it. After you're familiar with that vehicle and are out on the open road, you really shouldn't ever be looking down there. Your driving position and the consistent location of those parts make looking unnecessary.

The same should be true for the magazine release button and the magazine well. You don't need to look at them and, if you do, you almost certainly aren't paying attention to other far more important things in front of you or in the environment around you. When something appears suddenly on the road in front of your car, your foot moves in an automated way to the brake; you don't need to look for it and you don't even really need to think about it in terms of traditional decision-making. Your brain recognizes

the problem and, after an initial startle reaction that focuses you on the problem, you respond appropriately by hitting the brake. In the same way, when you feel slide lock, your brain should recognize the stimulus and begin the process of an emergency reload — *without* visual reference.

**5.** There are many buttons and levers in your car that you probably don't use very often while driving but that you certainly could if you needed to. The levers or buttons that you use to adjust your seat position are probably a great example: Generally, you make adjustments to them only when you aren't moving. (This is the equivalent of administrative gun handling, meaning outside of the context of defensive shooting or training.)

You may have been on a long highway drive at some point and decided to make an adjustment just to change things up and make yourself a bit more comfortable or to adjust the pressure

on your back or neck. You could make that adjustment without taking your eyes off the road, though it probably wouldn't be as smooth or automated as the way you shift gears without looking or even the way you use your turn signal without looking down at the stalk. This type of maneuver is probably similar to the way you would use your slide stop to lock your gun open during a malfunction response or to administratively unload your gun and confirm that the chamber area is empty of ammunition.

**6.** Now think about opening the hood of your car and checking the engine oil and changing the air filter. These are multi-step processes that do require visual reference and are never done while you are actually driving. You don't need to do these things in order to drive your car every day. (If you do, it's time to get to a mechanic or get a new car.) The same is true with your gun. Think of field-stripping your gun and performing simple maintenance and lubrication as the equivalents of changing the oil and replacing the air filter of your car. If you need to perform maintenance every time you shoot a few rounds or are consistently dealing with malfunctions, it's time to get to a gunsmith or switch to a more reliable firearm.

■ While it is true that with practice, you could learn to use even the most complicated firearm well, there is no point in setting yourself up for extra work. Simplicity in your tools makes your training easier and your practice more efficient as well.



CHAPTER FIVE

# PLAUSIBILITY PRINCIPLE





**T**he Plausibility Principle is a fundamental concept that can help you sift through the incredible amount of information available in the world of self-defense, firearms and tactical training. It can also help you manage your valuable, limited training resources, namely time, effort and money.

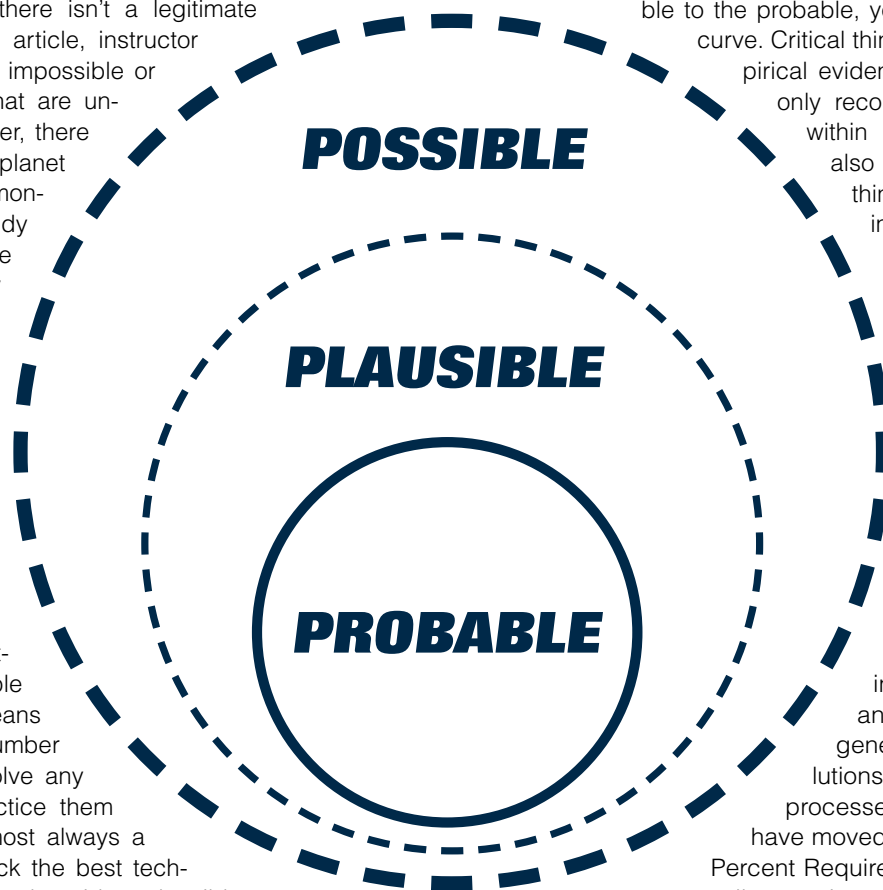
On the one hand, there isn't a legitimate training-related school, article, instructor or website offering the impossible or teaching techniques that are unachievable. On the other, there isn't a person on the planet who has enough time, money and energy to study and learn all the possible techniques for every possible deadly force situation. With that in mind, simply saying that something could happen or that a technique works under some specific set of circumstances isn't enough.

This is another problem with the "another tool for the toolbox" attitude. Too often, people think the phrase means they should have a number of different ways to solve any one problem and practice them all equally. That is almost always a waste of resources; pick the best technique that will work over the widest plausible set of circumstances and learn to execute it very well. That, of course, starts with identifying the most likely problems you'll need to solve and the circumstances under which you are most likely to face them.

After you've covered the most probable situations, focus your attention on situations that are probably less likely but still reasonably plausible and learn their attendant skillsets. Based on empirical evidence — experience of others, available statistics,

physiology, human behavior, natural reactions, the way your equipment works, environmental trends, innovative training developments and a host of other data — you can make educated guesses to best allocate your training resources.

After a situation's reasonably moved from the plausible to the probable, you're already behind the curve. Critical thinking and scrutiny of empirical evidence will allow you to not only recognize what is obviously within the probable area but also help you determine the things that should fall within the almost-as-important plausible zone.



### **QUALIFICATION COURSES**

Law enforcement qualification courses have evolved in two ways over the last couple of decades. First, they've generally gotten more realistic in terms of distances to the targets and the inclusion of movement and reloads. These have generally been positive evolutions. Second, the scoring processes in many jurisdictions have moved to a "Pass/Fail" or "100 Percent Requirement." This has been a generally negative evolution.

Changing the location and size of the target area on a human torso to more accurately reflect the high-center chest and generally counting any hit in that area as equal to any other is a more realistic scoring system that discourages the overemphasis on marksmanship. Adding a requirement to move offline from the threat while presenting from the holster and reloading, requiring a stage of moving and shooting at very close quarters, and requiring emergency reloads to be

# IN SELF-DEFENSE, THERE ARE **NO RULES.** AVOID DANGER IF YOU CAN, ESCAPE THREATS WHENEVER POSSIBLE AND FIGHT AS HARD AS YOU NEED TO IN ORDER TO SURVIVE.

performed in the middle of a string of fire add to the realism and chaos of the qualification process, making it (slightly) more like an actual fight.

Unfortunately, politicization of the scoring procedures hasn't helped improve the value of training. Initially, I had hoped that by switching to a "Pass/Fail" system, officers would be encouraged to speed up their achievement of passing scores, getting defensively accurate hits onto their targets at a faster pace. While this has certainly occurred for some officers who previously obsessed over trying to get the highest score possible without any regard for speed, in my observations around the U.S., just as many officers have remained complacent with shooting tight, slow groups, even if only to satisfy their own egos. In the worst cases of "100 Percent Requirement" scoring systems, the performance standard in static drills counts a shot that just barely cuts the line of the elbow or hip of a torso target the same as one that hits the center of the chest or head, which overcorrects the emphasis on marksmanship from the old systems to an unreasonable extreme.

A drill in which a student is required to engage a varied number of rounds at targets that need to be identified on the fly at varying distances will yield a much better idea of how well a shooter will perform in a real defensive shooting. This type of evaluation — which, in its ideal form, varies from repetition to repetition — tends to clearly demonstrate to both the shooter and instructor what aspects of defensive shooting, gun handling and possibly even survival tactics (such as lateral movement or use of cover) need to be improved.

All too often, skills that are performed very well in isolation fall apart under the stress of a critical incident because they haven't been learned to the point of execution without specific focus or anticipation. The type of evaluation mentioned above is more cumbersome to administer, can only be scored subjectively and does not result in much ego satisfaction, as it is intended to reveal weaknesses rather than show linear performance improvements. For these reasons, it is unlikely that the public sector will adopt anything like it into their bureaucratic environment. In the private sector, however, we may avail ourselves of it and everything it has to offer.

If you are sincere about your desire to be as prepared as possible to defend yourself and those you care about, it should be an easy decision to choose training for the real world over training for the racetrack.

## **COMPETITION AS PRACTICE OR EVALUATION**

Over the years, I've been relatively vocal about my opinion that when it comes to developing defensive shooting skills, there exist far better ways to spend your limited training resources than shooting competitions. This is mildly annoying to some people who want to justify their hobbies as "training" and downright heretical to those whose *raison d'être* is scores on a timer.

Be that as it may, I honestly believe that engaging in competitions inevitably causes one to compromise techniques, tactics and sometimes even gear for points. You see, as soon as you set out to make a game fair, you have to establish rules and controls. After you establish rules and controls, you've created a structure,

and you can cater your play within that structure to maximize your score. Rules, controls and structure that you definitively plan for in advance don't really exist in fights, much less dynamic critical incidents.

Testing your time double-tapping targets and swinging through them against firing randomized bursts and feigning an assessment between each engagement is a foregone conclusion. That example alone should at least cast doubt upon the validity of competition scores (or similar "testing" drills that are little more than mini-competitions) as a means to determine what works best. Along these lines, here are a few thoughts from renowned self-defense author and instructor Grant Cunningham:

*The whole "shooting under stress" thing is misguided, largely because of confusion between the biological definition of stress and the popular definition. People mistake performance anxiety for the kind of extreme stress that happens in a real attack.*

*I shot competition for many years, and am very familiar with the stress that it brings: the increased breathing, the sweaty palms, the butterflies in the pit of the stomach and, in some cases, the feeling that you're going to vomit. I was able to manage that, because I'd felt it before: as a musician, stepping on stage to play in front of 100 or 200 people. The stress of those two events were absolutely identical and remain so to this day.*

*Now, if I told you that the best way to prepare yourself to respond to a violent attack was to play a trumpet in front of an audience, what would you say? You should properly say, "Bull!"*

*But wait — not only are they both "stress," they're the exact same kind of "stress," and they both entail using fine motor skills and high-level cognitive processing under that "stress." So why is one somehow applicable, and the other not? Answer: Neither is!*

*It's because they're both simple performance anxiety. Just like in a musical performance, in a shooting match, you have lots of time — hours, maybe even days — to ratchet up your anxiety level worrying about how well you'll do. You can practice and, in the case of a shooting match, you get a walk-through or at least a stage description that allows you to think about what you'll do and build up even more anxiety. Finally, when you get to shoot, that anxiety either torpedoes you or you fight through it and do well.*

*Now compare that "stress" to what happens when you're suddenly and brutally attacked. You have very little, if any, warning that it's going to happen; you have no preparation time, and the emotional reaction is one of sheer terror. The body*







- The kind of stress you might feel shooting in front of others or in a competition is a completely different kind of stress than what you're likely to experience during a critical incident. Don't assume the former is a simulation of the latter.

*reacts in very specific and predictable ways, none of which happen when shooting even the most challenging match. Vision is affected, fine motor skills are diminished, the body instinctively does certain things with regard to positioning and orientation to the threat—none of which happen during a match. In fact, the way that most people shoot those matches has no resemblance to what happens when they're in a fight for their life.*

*I know some very respected people have talked about this idea of "shooting under match stress" for a long time, but IMHO they're incorrect in both their assumptions and their conclusions.*

It is worth noting that my disdain for competition has evolved over the years, as I've seen more students with bad habits from games and more bad techniques or gear justified by participation in them. Many years ago, when I was offered the opportunity to write for *S.W.A.T. Magazine*, I wrote an article called "Qualification Isn't Training." That article listed many options that law enforcement officers had available to them if they were looking to supplement their departments' firearms training offerings. Listed prominently among them was participation in IDPA. The fact is that, if the other option is zero trigger time, some forms of competition might be acceptable options.

But don't rationalize your interest in playing games with guns as training. If you truly enjoy the fun and friendship that can be found in competition shooting, I would not discourage you from participating. If you compete in "defensive-style" games with a firearm that is close in operation and feel to your defensive tool, I would advise you to be sure to offset any bad habits developed with ample defensive training.

It would be better for you to consider a form of competition that doesn't overlap with your defensive training. The world of firearms has much to offer, from clay sports to long-range precision rifle to Cowboy Action Shooting. It was this last category in which I competed for a season years ago on the advice of Clint Smith. He suggested I take up Cowboy Action because it was far removed from anything resembling "defensive" or "tactical" shooting and I could just relax and enjoy the courses of fire with great people. He was absolutely right.

At the time, I had just launched the Valhalla Training Center (VTC) and was neck-deep in all the things that came along with launching a business. I wasn't shooting nearly as much as I would've liked for my own skill development and maintenance, and I certainly wasn't going to be able to devote significant time to be competitive in a gun game. Atop that, I worried much more about the expectations of others than I should have. Although I had been writing regularly for *S.W.A.T. Magazine* and had been involved in the industry for a while by then, the exposure I got when VTC launched was like nothing I'd ever experienced.

I was far too concerned about what people would think if I continued to compete casually; most of the big-name trainers through the 1980s and '90s prided themselves on (and garnered a fair amount of their business by) being great shooters and

proving as much on the competitive range. Successful competitive shooters dominated the early years of private-sector defensive firearms training in the U.S. In fact, many of the early leaders in our industry literally wrote the rulebooks for IPSC and IDPA. What would people think if some random guy purporting to offer "world-class training" didn't win every match he entered?

Of course, I now know better. On the rare occasion I jump into a competition at a conference or charity event, I have no problem just having fun or choosing to shoot the course of fire the way I would train someone to use it as an Intuitive Defensive Shooting practice session (thus virtually guaranteeing

I'll get the lowest score of any competitor who completes the stage). There is an infamous video clip you may be able to find online of me flubbing a reload during a charity run of the late Todd Green's "FAST Drill."

I had actually had two decent runs and was in the middle of the third phase of the drill when things went hilariously south (at least for anyone who was watching). To participate, I had to borrow a "shoot me first" vest from Marty Hayes. If you know Marty, you know that he is about 6 inches taller and a good bit broader than me. After I grabbed a handful of vest with the magazine, the latter ended up on the ground about 3 feet to my weak side. I looked down at it and proceeded to perform a sideways dive-roll to retrieve it, rolling back up to a standing position as I

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**IF YOU COMPETE IN  
'DEFENSIVE-STYLE' GAMES  
WITH A FIREARM THAT IS  
CLOSE IN OPERATION AND  
FEEL TO YOUR DEFENSIVE  
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TO BE SURE TO OFFSET ANY  
BAD HABITS DEVELOPED  
WITH AMPLE DEFENSIVE  
TRAINING.**  
”



■ There's nothing wrong with competitive shooting, as long as it doesn't interfere with your defensive training. Mounted competition, for example, will be different enough from defensive training as to not overlap.

loaded and chambered a round. (The muzzle of the pistol stayed oriented at the berm the entire time, of course.) I knew my score was ruined at that point and I also knew that I hadn't actually contributed any money to charity.

You see, the small target area was surrounded by \$20 bills. Any misses meant that you had to "replace" the bills you shot with your own money (which would go to charity at the end of the event). I proceeded to shoot each of the four bills on my target on purpose and gave Todd \$100. Everyone laughed, though a few people were anxious to review the video someone happened to be recording to ensure that I'd kept my pistol's muzzle safely downrange. To this day, many years later, it makes me smile a bit because of the fun we had that day, but it also reminds me of why I'd been worried about my performance if I engaged in defensive shooting competitions for which I wasn't really practicing or taking seriously.

I share this story to remind you that if you do find yourself in a position where you are compelled to participate in competition shooting as "practice" for your defensive shooting skills, you are going to have to make choices in regard to either compromising your gear and techniques in order to get a better score or ignoring the score (and the peanut gallery) and just doing what you know you should be doing the way you should be doing it — within the parameters of the range rules and safety procedures, of course. I recommend choosing the latter. Or, better yet, actually practice for your defensive shooting skill development and maintenance and choose a gun game that is distinctly different so that you can just enjoy it. My friend Rob Leatham, the most accomplished competitive pistol shooter of all time, has more fun than just about anyone I know when he is on the range. He sets a great example for us all.





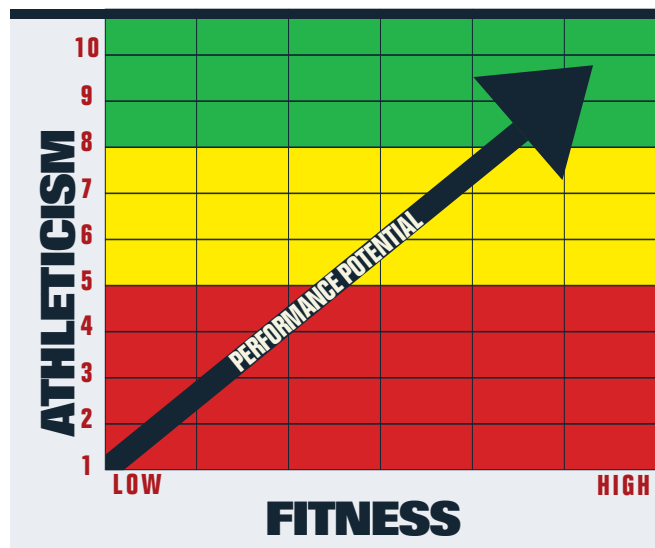
CHAPTER SIX

# ***FIGHTING IS AN ATHLETIC ENDEAVOR***

In 2010, I launched FitShot, a program intended to increase the overall fitness levels of those interested in defensive shooting. While there may be some hyperbole in the way many have talked about the average fitness level of shooters at the range, it cannot be denied that I've seen many would-be defensive shooters in class who all but completely ignore the importance of physical fitness in regard to self-defense and general survival. For many people, the possession of firearms and the ability to hit targets at the range are comforting. They believe, at least subconsciously, that having guns is some kind of talisman against danger and that being good marksmen indicates an automatic ability to defeat lethal threats that may pierce their bubbles of situational awareness. But fighting is an athletic endeavor. If you can't get to your gun while seated because you can barely get in or out of a chair (let alone move around efficiently in one), or if any elevation in heart rate causes you to become hypoxic almost instantly, you are not going to fight well.

I do stress in classes that athleticism and fitness are two very different things. Just because you are not generally "fit" does not mean that you cannot be athletic. Fitness is your raw attributes: strength, agility, stamina, flexibility and speed; athleticism is how you use your fitness. Obviously, increasing your fitness increases your ability to perform athletically and fight to defend yourself or others, so your defensive shooting practice should reflect the athletic nature of a defensive event.

The FitShot Program blended fitness and shooting development. While the idea of performing fitness tasks immediately prior to the performance of shooting skills has been around for a long time, blending the two was a new approach. Finding ways to safely engage in exercise while on a live-fire range, often with a firearm in your hands, is not to be taken lightly. As such, in developing the program, the emphasis always had to be on safety. The program was not intended to entice people who were interested in fitness as a hobby into becoming shooters, and fundamental firearms handling and shooting skills were prerequisites for participation.



■ Even a person with low fitness can perform athletically. Your best potential for performance during a critical incident, however, comes from being both highly fit and highly athletic.



Whether or not you combine your fitness development and your shooting skills training, do not overlook the importance of your health, strength, flexibility, stamina and other physical attributes in relation to your ability to protect yourself in general or apply your shooting skills in a fight.

I strongly believe that through understanding how your body and brain work, you can make your training better. With this knowledge, you can develop techniques and tactics that are more likely to work in a real fight, and you can more readily integrate your body's natural responses into your training and fighting plans. In his book, *Making up the Mind*, Chris Frith clearly expresses an incredibly important concept in such a way that it is worth quoting a few sentences here:

"In the physical world, behavior is changed by rewards and pun-



ishments. We stop doing things that cause us pain. We repeat actions that lead to pleasure. We can alter the behavior of others using pain and pleasure — this is how we train animals. But, in the mental world, behavior is changed by knowledge.”

Were that paragraph not true, there would be no point in reading this book. If you needed to go out to the range and actually shoot in order to truly learn anything about shooting, all shooting books would be useless. If you needed to experience all of the different ways to reload your gun in order to understand which way is best for you, you would waste a lot of time on the range. Luckily for us, however, we can change our behavior by understanding information that is presented to us by someone else. In a grander sense, the ability to store and transfer knowledge in book form is a fundamental tenet of modern civilization.

Of course, you still need to go out to the range and you still need to experience shooting and all of the other actions that could be involved in defending yourself with a firearm. This book will not replace your range training, but it is intended to make your training more efficient by providing you with knowledge about what to practice and why to practice it. While some of the information in this chapter may seem extraneous, if you’re truly interested in making yourself a more efficient warrior, you should consider this section a primer and seek out as much information as you can about the way your human weapon system works. I recommend reading Bruce Siddle’s book, *Sharpening the Warrior’s Edge* (1995). While I was aware of Mr. Siddle and his work for quite some time, I only read this book a few years ago. I found it to be an outstanding overview of many of the areas covered in this chapter.

Understanding the role of your brain in rapid decision-making and complex-motor-skill execution is vital to developing efficient techniques and tactics. When looking at the worst-case scenarios, the actions and interactions of the unconscious parts of your brain becomes incredibly important. In fact, I will submit that most of the poorly thought-out techniques and tactics that have been taught and re-taught over the years are often the product of a lack of understanding in this area. If the only objective examination that a skillset or tactic is given is in a training environment, it’s hard to be sure that it will operate equally well in a counter-ambush moment unless the known actions of your brain and body under such stress are taken into account.

Of course, many of the classic skills taught in the past were believed to have been “battle-tested” or at least based on actual



■ Understanding how you and your loved ones are likely to react to violent danger is one of the keys to effectively training for firearms-based self-defense. Fighting is physical, so train that way.

events. That said, one of the flaws of those beliefs is that, until very recently, the only thing we had to go by in terms of the efficacy of a technique during an actual fight was the recollection of the participants. While we want to show all due respect to those before us who've faced danger, we also need to maintain an objective mindset with regard to the information they pass on.

As I mentioned earlier, we need to respect the man, but challenge the material. If someone survives dozens of potentially lethal encounters and lives to tell about it, he or she certainly deserves our respect. Whether he or she survived by luck, toughness or applied skill, he or she probably has much to offer us in our own preparation to face such trials. Acknowledging that, we need to be healthily skeptical of shared lessons that rely entirely on an individual's personal recollections of details during such an event, especially if that event was an ambush. While I would never even begin to belittle the seriousness of lethal encounters initiated against an enemy as a member of a military or other assault team, the brain deals with those encounters very differently from one individual to another. We also know that memory formation during such stressful incidents can be unreliable, with blanks often being filled in by belief, supposition or contemplated explanation. Furthermore, the lessons from an aggressor's perspective, even if accurate, might not be appropriate to the study or the application of defensive skills.

Over the past decade or so, dash-camera videos and surveillance footage of actual ambush situations have given us a plethora of new data. Developing tactics, techniques, theories and training methods before this era of empirical evidence was comparatively like trying to form ideas about the night sky before the invention of the telescope. We now know that the sun is not pulled across the sky by a chariot. Just as we didn't find Helios driving horses in front of the center of our solar system when we as a species finally mastered the telescope, we also have yet to see a dash-camera video depicting someone responding to a

lethal ambush from a textbook Weaver shooting position.

Just as modern-day cognitive psychologists can admire the elegance of Plato's description of the constant battle between reason and emotion, they can also dismiss the theory that we'd be better off if ruled by reason alone. While Plato wrote of the need to control the wild and untamed part of the brain, we know now that our emotional reactions are not only important but also specifically necessary to get through life, especially for our most important and urgent decisions.

When we add information from the recordings of dynamic critical incidents to the realities we observe in our training environments — from the classroom to the range to a scenario house — we can start to get a very clear picture of what makes sense and what lessons can span the distance between practice and real life.

One of the keys to spanning that sometimes-vast chasm is internalizing and accepting certain realities of mind and body. If you don't even know how your brain works, let alone how it reacts to certain stimuli to make certain things happen instinctively (regardless of training or desire), it is nearly impossible to design a defensive response that is going to be efficient in an ambush situation.

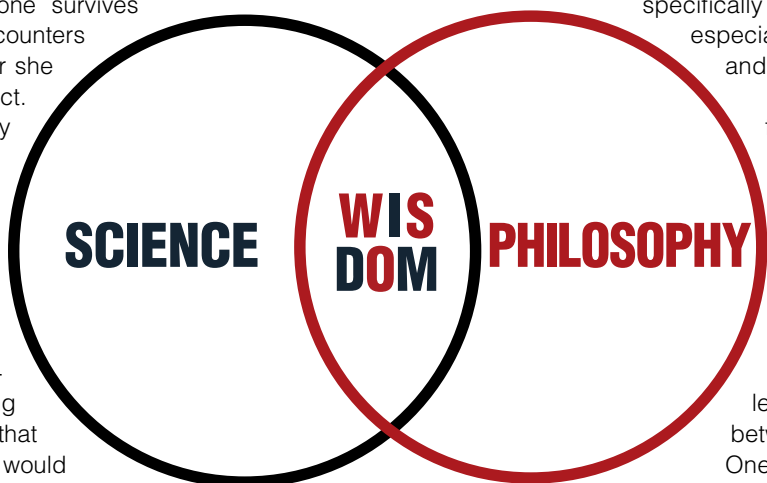
## **THREAT RESPONSES**

In plain English, your brain and body react to threats in both external and internal ways:

### **EXTERNAL**

#### **Lowering Your Center of Gravity**

The most obvious action you take in response to a threat is lowering your center of gravity; generally, you bend your knees and bend forward at the waist. This response has been observed in just about every dash camera video and role-player-stimulated startle response I've ever seen. The global war on terror, with the ubiquitous use of explosive devices and the



constant presence of videographers, has given us countless scenes of men ducking reflexively in response to explosions before consciously processing information and reacting in more effective ways. In the event of an auditory stimulus from the rear, an instinctive crouch actually initiates before the subject orients his head toward the threat. There are several reasons for this.

If you think about the human body, you have to lower your center of gravity to move. Even if you are going to try to jump straight up, you have to bend at the knees first. While it may be possible to propel yourself up a short distance by rapidly raising your heels and rolling on the balls of your feet, this is not a naturally occurring form of movement. Humans bend their knees and move their upper bodies at their waists to get from one place to another. Changing your location makes it harder to hurt you, hence the instant survival benefit.

When we talk about the presentation of a firearm later in the book, you'll see how you can increase the odds of having your gun pointed in the right place even if your target is moving, but the odds are decidedly better if that target is standing still. The principle is obviously the same for any other type of attack across all species: It's easier to hit, stab, bite, kick, ram, tackle, strike or cut a stationary target. Lowering your center of gravity automatically puts your body in a position to move as soon as your brain decides where to move, and, keeping this in mind, you should make sure that your stance is one that accepts this body position.

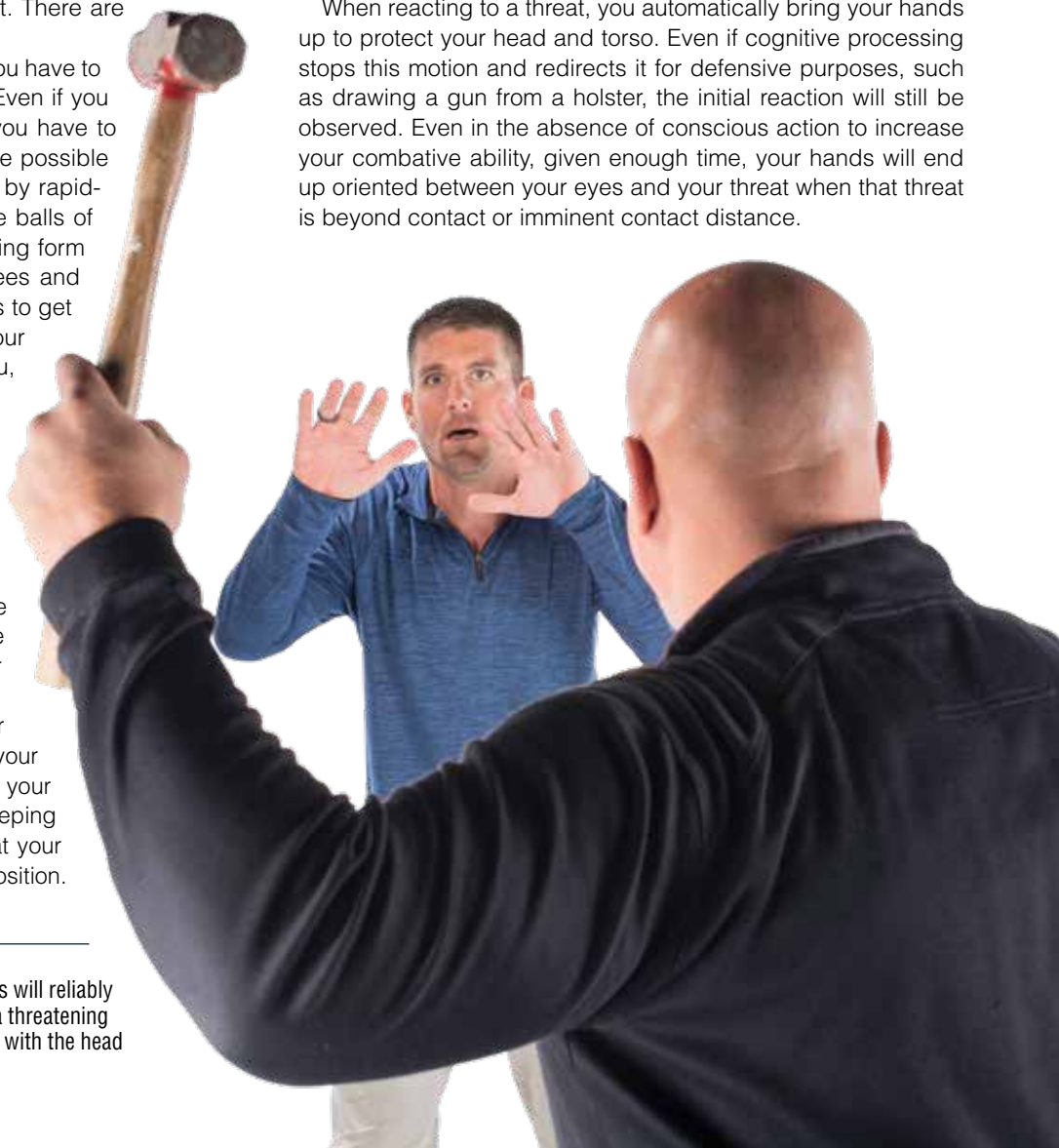
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■ Across all cultures and age groups, humans will reliably lift their arms and orient themselves toward a threatening entity. This instinct brings the hands into line with the head in an attempt to protect the eyes and brain.

Any other training stance will condition you to adjust from this natural position, which takes time and effort and is decidedly inefficient.

### **Hands Move to the Line of the Stimulus**

When reacting to a threat, you automatically bring your hands up to protect your head and torso. Even if cognitive processing stops this motion and redirects it for defensive purposes, such as drawing a gun from a holster, the initial reaction will still be observed. Even in the absence of conscious action to increase your combative ability, given enough time, your hands will end up oriented between your eyes and your threat when that threat is beyond contact or imminent contact distance.





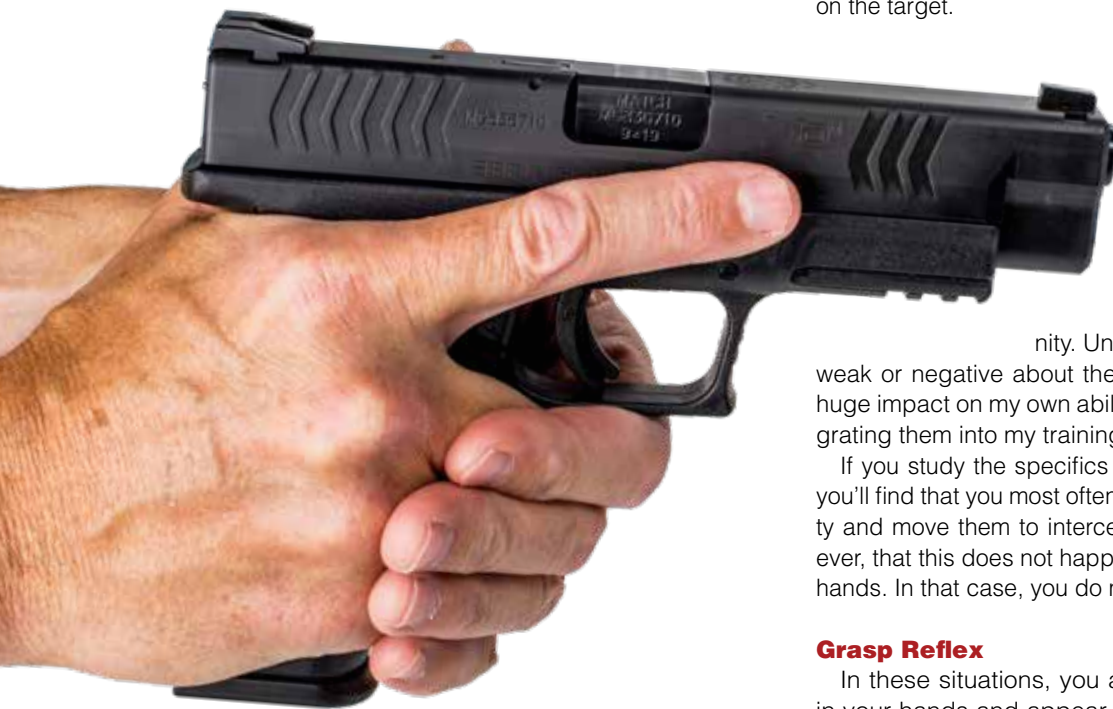
The speed with which this happens is close enough to instant to be referred to as such. In 30-frames-per-second review of videos of the startle flinch responses generated by simulated close-quarters attacks, we generally see the hands move from the waist area to the face in between six and eight frames (about .25 seconds) when there is not cognitive redirection by a subject to draw his or her own gun at the recognition of a threat.

The brain wants to put the hands in front of the face, specifically at eye level relative to the threat. To train with the gun at any other position is therefore counterintuitive. Contact shooting and extreme close-quarters considerations aside, you want your gun in your line of sight — toward the target. (These scenarios are not addressing attacks or alarms that occur within two arms' reach.)

In the years that I spent training in and teaching the SPEAR Unarmed Defense Program, I became very familiar with the wide

variety and nuances of potential startle reactions. Keep in mind the specific scenarios we're dealing with in the Combat Focus Shooting Program during which these flinches are simulated; I've attempted to present a simplified approach to integrating that flinch for dealing with the efficient development of skills that are consistent with reactions to threats from beyond two arms' reach that are detected suddenly by the brain.

My training and work with SPEAR is what initially caused me to realize the importance of integrating realistic reactions and other aspects of learned responses during ambush situations into firearms training. Because of the typical reactions in these situations, while training, you should initiate your draw sequence most often from a position that has your hands in front of your torso, between your waist and your line of sight. It is even better if you simulate being startled by moving your hands to this position on the shooting command while lowering your center of gravity and focusing on the target.



- Keeping your finger specifically away from the trigger area works to prevent a negligent discharge should you be startled while holding a gun.

This simulation of a startle reaction is a simple addition to your defensive firearms training that will make it much more realistic in regard to preparing for an ambush. I've stopped using the term "flinch" to describe this natural startle reaction because of the negative connotations that word suffers in the training community. Understanding that there isn't anything

weak or negative about these natural protective actions had a huge impact on my own ability to accept them and to begin integrating them into my training.

If you study the specifics of various types of startle reactions, you'll find that you most often open your hands when they're empty and move them to intercept threats. It should be noted, however, that this does not happen when you have something in your hands. In that case, you do much the opposite.

### Grasp Reflex

In these situations, you actually clamp down on the object in your hands and appear to try to maintain its relationship to your core. Again, this offers a survival benefit in the natural world. In fact, I've gone as far as to theorize that this grasp reflex developed specifically to keep our distant ancestors from



■ Whenever you're startled or scared, there are certain physical reactions that are out of your control. You cannot prevent them, but you can harness them. Integrating the natural "startle reactions" into your training is one of the most important steps you can take, especially since you'll have very limited success in trying to eliminate them entirely from your reaction to any startling stimulus.

falling out of trees when startled or letting go of their mothers when a predator suddenly appeared.

In the modern world, this positive effect shows up if you get startled while climbing a ladder or when you miss a step while climbing the stairs and your hand clamps down on the railing. When it comes to defensive shooting, the most important thing to remember about grasp reflex is that you need to keep your finger away from the trigger when you aren't actually shooting, lest any startle cause a micro-flinch grasp reflex and a negligent discharge. Using an extended ready position can contribute to your finger moving toward the trigger before you've decided to shoot, which is a major reason to practice a compressed ready position when you have a gun in your hand but are not ready to shoot.

### **Orienting Toward the Threat**

As soon as a shocking or threatening stimulus is presented to your brain, your brain starts trying to figure out what it is and how

to stop it from hurting you. This is a good thing. Humans receive this threatening stimulus through one or more of the following systems: visual, auditory or tactile. Of the three, an auditory response is the fastest, followed by visual and then tactile.

The speed of subtle tactile reactions is also different throughout the body. While having a bullet pass through the hand or foot may elicit the same practical response, someone unexpectedly touching the back of your hand with a cold spoon will not elicit nearly the reaction that the same touch would on the side of your abdomen. Similarly, certain frequencies of sound elicit more of a response at any given volume than others. The speed of visual reactions is tied to the speed and proximity of movement, with faster and closer stimuli causing more immediate responses.

One important thing to keep in mind from this point forward is that the reactions we're discussing here are automated, not cognitive. If you reach out to move a clean, empty casserole pan on your kitchen counter and it's hot, you pull your hand back immediately and only then do you look over at the oven to see that



## **AUTOMATED SURVIVAL REACTION TIME TO THREATENING STIMULUS**

**FAST = TACTILE**  
**FASTER = VISUAL**  
**FASTEST = AUDITORY**

■ All training aside, the name of the game is getting your sidearm out as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to employ it to save your life or the lives of others. However, practicing to be fast without integrating the context of being caught off-guard is wasted time that is likely to make you overconfident. Work with your body in this regard, not against it.

it's on and pre-heating to 450 degrees, thereby deducing that someone accidentally left the pan in the oven and only recently removed it. If the withdrawal reflex from the hot glass were cognitive instead of automated, you would look at the oven, deduce that the glass was probably hot enough to hurt your hand and then remove it. The latter option, no matter how fast, would result in far worse damage to your skin. The body's survival reactions have all evolved like that, either to decrease damage to the body before the more contemplative parts of the process kick in or to speed up the process of figuring it out.

As soon as you hear, see or feel the threat, your brain focuses on learning more about it. The first part of the process is your orientation toward the threat. Humans are incredibly visually oriented, as our eyes are our primary means of gathering information. Even during conversations, you key in on facial expressions and body language to help add context and meaning to the words you hear. When you're startled, your head and soon thereafter your body orient toward the threat. If you're seated or otherwise prevented from turning your body toward the threat, your head still orients your eyes toward the stimulus in an attempt to identify the problem and figure out how to mitigate it.

Humans do not go toe-to-toe with natural predators and win. We survived to become the dominant species on the planet by out-thinking and out-maneuvering bears, cats, dogs and any other naturally stronger and better-armed animal that we came across, and the utilization of tools and shelter is part of this out-thinking. Had we not observed the animals and their behaviors quickly and accurately, we would have zigged when we should've zagged or failed to implement the right tools for defense or offense.

The same is true for man-to-man combat. If you take away your ability to see your enemy, you'll have a hard time figuring out how to defeat him, let alone survive. With this in mind, you should try not to limit the amount of visual information you take in by closing one eye or focusing on a 3-millimeter-wide piece of metal when you should be looking at the bad guy.





■ If you've never experienced a violent encounter, it will specifically behoove you to understand just how different your senses will be processing what's going on around you. Your eyes, ears and indeed your circulatory system will all instinctively react to danger, and it is important that you understand what you will be facing under such a circumstance.

If you've been involved in tactical training for long, you may have heard of Colonel Boyd's "O.O.D.A. Loop." I find it to be an unfortunate fact that while many people have heard of the O.O.D.A. Loop, they are not actually familiar with its history or the thorough explanations Colonel Boyd provided for each step.

When you think of orienting toward a threat, you should think of not just a physical turning but also an emotional and intellectual orientation. When Colonel Boyd explained the "Orient" step, he stressed focusing your attention on the object that initiated the reaction. With that in mind, let's take a look at other internal aspects of your body's natural reactions.

## **INTERNAL**

### **Changes in Blood Flow**

The internal reactions to being startled can be thought of as changes in blood flow. Fundamentally, blood is what brings energy to the various parts of your body; the more blood present in a particular part of the body, the more active it becomes and the more work it can get done. Changes in blood flow occur rapidly as the brain prioritizes certain functions during a dynamic critical incident, and this way of thinking about the internal reactions serves us very well.

### **Rise in Visual Acuity in the Center of Your Field of Vision**

Of the internal factors I cover in this book, this is the most important to understand. In short, it means that you will be able to see better in the center of your field of vision. If you've read about or have been through much defensive training, you've probably heard this referred to as "tunnel vision." Immediately labeling something with a negative title like "tunnel vision" and thinking of it as a reduction of peripheral vision does not help us to understand the value of the phenomenon or accept the logic of its existence.

Physiologically, this is actually an easy phenomenon to understand. In the case of the increase of visual acuity in the center of your field of vision, the blood supply to your cones (one of the two types of receptors on the back of your eyes, the other being rods), which are concentrated in the center of your eyes, increases. Again, note that I purposefully express this effect as an increase in your ability to gather information from the center of your field of vision.

Too often, I've heard the phenomenon of tunnel vision expressed as a loss of peripheral vision. This is the same as saying that by putting more food in your refrigerator, you are decreasing

the amount of air as opposed to increasing the amount of available nutrition.

We've already covered the fact that your brain instinctively orients your head toward a threat, placing that real or perceived threat in the center of your field of vision. Increasing your ability to gather information in this area is a significant increase in your ability to survive; it is not a loss of anything. The tactical considerations after the recognized threat is defeated (the need to "break" from your "tunnel vision" and focus on that threat) is very real, but in the midst of an immediate conflict, this is a powerful redistribution of energy that the brain does for no reason other than to make you more dangerous to your attacker. By being able to gather more information about the threat, you can respond more efficiently and appropriately.

### **Distortion in the Perception of Time**

Technically, tachypsychia is any perception of the distortion of time, and when someone perceives a period of time as being shorter or longer than it actually is, this is the cause. In most critical incidents, the effect is a perception that time has slowed down, though this is not always the case. Unfortunately, we can't hook a computer up to a person's brain and project his or her memories or current perceptions onto a screen to see if he or she is collecting more detail in any given time-frame than at any other.

This is one area in which we must rely on subjective testimony for much of the available cited information, and multiple factors affect this testimony in the real world. Careers, reputations, finances, family and many other variables may hang in the balance of the difference between "It happened so fast, I don't remember anything," and "Everything went into slow motion, I recall the details vividly." The overwhelming majority of responses with regard to the perception of time during the initial moments of fear — especially during incidents that occurred with little to no warning — indicate a perception that time slowed down during the incident.

Looking away from the lethal-threat environment for a moment, the most common example of tachypsychia is probably the way most individuals remember details of traffic accidents. When a deer runs out into the road or another car blows through a red light, most people report vivid detail about the final portions of a second that occur before impact.

In the simplest terms, this is because the brain speeds up the processing of the information it's receiving, especially from

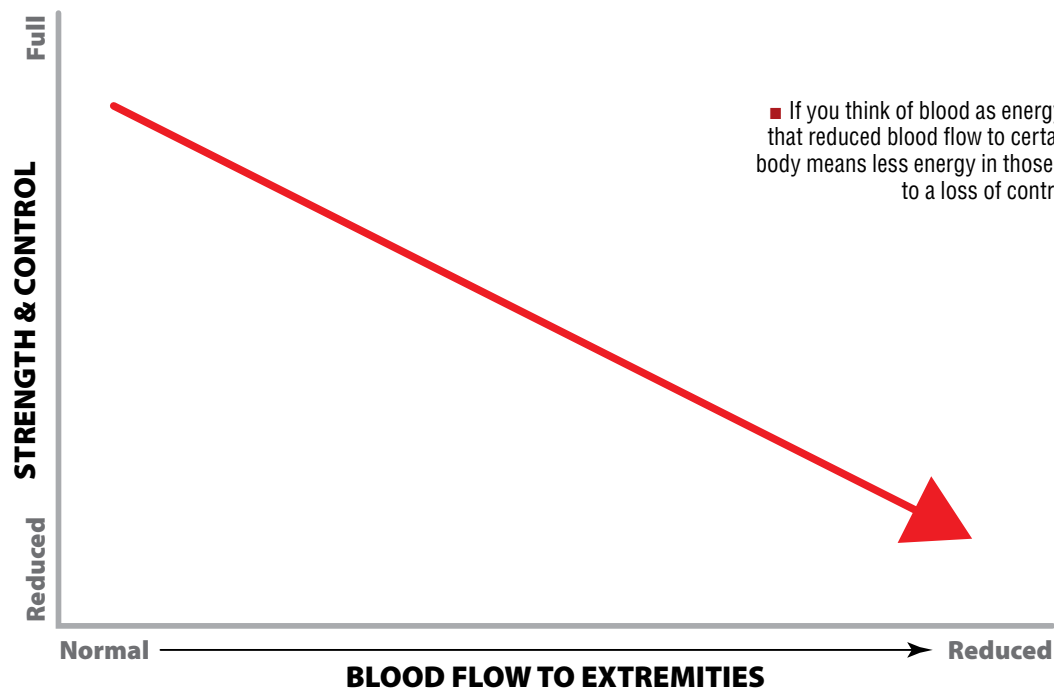
the eyes, during a dynamic critical incident. In these situations, you can think of your brain as a video camera that is recording at a higher rate of frames per second than normal. What is the survival positive of this phenomenon? Well, by processing more information in a given period of time, the decisions and responses you make can be more accurate.

It's important to remember that these decisions may happen so fast as to be inarticulable. Several years ago, I served as a training consultant to an agency that was working under a policy requiring an officer to individually articulate a need for each shot fired during a defensive shooting. Given that the average person can easily send a shot every quarter of a second during a string of fire, that would mean that an officer would potentially need to separately explain the reasons for firing four or more shots sent within one second, which is basically impossible to do with any integrity or practical legitimacy.

This does not mean, however, that the individual in question is not making individual decisions to fire each shot; in fact, what is most likely happening during those fractions of a second is that the subconscious parts of the brain are indeed making decisions to shoot based on perception and recognition of a continuing threat. That said, expecting someone to articulate — or even worry about having to articulate — those non-cognitive decisions is ridiculous; the phenomenon of tachypsychia empowers your brain to make those decisions more accurately and, as such, know that your actions were justified.

One potentially detrimental effect of this distortion of the perception of time is the reliance on visual references for the execution of complex motor skills. Picture when you were under time pressure to perform a complex or fine motor skill. Perhaps you were in a military unit racing your peers to reassemble a firearm. Maybe you were at a party trying to complete a puzzle against a timer. Whatever it was, you or someone else in the group may have encountered significant trouble because you were rushing. Rushing is what occurs when the thinking part of your brain tries to push the motor cortex to perform skills faster than normal. When you're rushing, you're more likely to screw things up.

Now picture yourself in a critical incident and needing to reload your pistol. This is a complex, possibly fine, set of motor skills that you should have practiced many times prior to needing it. During your practice, you would've found a pace that allowed you to complete the reload as quickly as possible in a reliable way. Now, under the stress of a lethal threat and



operating with a distorted perception of time, the thinking part of your brain may perceive your reload as going incredibly slowly. What happens when the message is sent to the motor cortex to hurry up?

Bear in mind that messages are communicated within the brain in fractions of fractions of seconds. If you start rushing midway through your reload because of a distortion in the perception of time, you could screw up, just like you may have screwed up other well-rehearsed skills while rushing. This is yet another reason to avoid looking at your firearm whenever completing reloads or clearing malfunctions.

### Reduction in Blood Flow to Extremities

During a critical incident, blood supply is decreased to your forearms and hands. Going back to the “blood = energy” analogy, those areas of the body, such as your fingers, are receiving proportionately less energy than they normally do, which equates to less control and strength. When combined

with the external natural reaction you might commonly think of as “flinching” — instinctively bringing your hands up between your head and the threat — this gives you the survival positive of allowing less blood loss through the area of the body most likely to receive injury. By reapportioning blood (energy)

to other areas of your body, it also allows those other areas to do more work, which can have its own survival benefits.

Whenever possible, Combat Focus Shooting stresses minimizing reliance on finer motor skills and instead utilizing large, consistent movements to present and align the firearm toward a threat and manipulate the firearm’s controls. Some finer motor skills, such as hitting the magazine release, are necessary for the operation of a firearm, but by keeping the way you do things and the position from which you do them as consistent as possible, everything gets easier to accomplish — even under a diminished capacity for fine motor control.

“  
**...THE VERY ESSENCE OF  
 AN INSTINCT IS THAT IT IS  
 FOLLOWED INDEPENDENTLY  
 OF REASON.**  
 CHARLES DARWIN,  
 THE DESCENT OF MAN (1871)  
 ”



A man in a plaid shirt is pointing towards a person in a dark shirt, likely during a training session. The background is dark and industrial.

CHAPTER SEVEN

# **INTEGRATING YOUR BODY'S NATURAL REACTIONS INTO YOUR TRAINING & RESPONSE PLAN**



## “ PRACTICE TO APPLY YOUR PHYSICAL SKILLS WHILE PROCESSING INFORMATION.”

ROB PINCUS

”

**W**hat does all this mean? Well, it means a lot, and to put it bluntly, too many people look at shooting as a mechanical process that occurs in isolation.

Yes, you can be more accurate if you close one eye and focus on the front sight ... in a vacuum. Yes, you can complete a reload faster with some guns by hitting the slide release to chamber a round ... but only with some guns, and only under controlled conditions. Yes, you can hit your target standing up perfectly straight ... but you know that you'll be crouching if you're startled, so shouldn't you practice that way?

Reality is real, and you cannot train hard or often enough to completely avoid any of the body's natural reactions (and you really shouldn't want to). You can't keep yourself from lowering your center of gravity when you are startled. You can't miracle your hands directly to your firearm when someone pulls a knife in a dark alley. By accepting the reality of the conditions under which you will be fighting, you can train more realistically and be better prepared for your actual fight.

As mentioned earlier (and worth mentioning again while this information is fresh in your mind), you may have heard people talk about how you will “fight like you train.” Usually, this is supposed to mean that you have to train in a certain way so that, if you find yourself in a real fight, you will react appropriately.

The problem with this line of thought is that, if you train hard or often enough, you can overcome your natural reactions in that training environment, and doing so is borderline suicidal. You need to train like you'll fight — or at least train to work with your natural predictable reactions. Your training needs to incorporate your likely contexts and the reactions that you know your body will have in those contexts or you will not be able to “fight like you've trained.” Combat Focus Shooting isn't about practicing target shooting skills in isolation; it's about developing an efficient way to solve a very immediate problem that brings with it a predictable set of factors.

### THINKING WHILE FIGHTING

As if it needs to be said, you will not be performing skills in a vacuum if you ever find yourself under attack. Surprisingly enough though, that doesn't always influence your training as much as it should. The hope that you will magically “fight like you've trained” is crushed by the evidence presented in video footage of actual fights. In short, training and practicing to collect and process information — to think — while you fight is vital.

One interesting observation during the development of the FitShot Program was just how much having to think affected athletic performance, even the performance of gross motor skills that ostensibly didn't require any real cognitive focus. At the first Crossfit gym that I owned, we were preparing to run a FitShot workout with training pistols that used lasers to indicate shot placement. When explaining the workout to the participants, they all indicated that the workout seemed too easy. I met them in the middle and slightly increased the fitness performance requirements.

Everyone involved maintained strenuous fitness regimens outside of their firearms training and were experienced shooters, but shortly into the workout, everyone agreed that the workout was a bit much, and would possibly have been so even as I'd originally planned it. What we learned was that the toll of the physical exertion was magnified by needing to focus on fine motor skills and on controlling potentially lethal tools. Having to think made physical performance harder. While we knew this in regard to the shooting and gun-handling skills, it was a revelation to see how much it affected the performance of activities like box jumps, burpees and push-ups. These seemingly mindless activities took a magnified toll on the students' bodies when their brains were actively focused on performance rather than “zoning out” while repeating physical activities.

After that session, I began paying much more attention: Observing athletes perform exercises in isolation and then watching them in FitShot exercises revealed this magnification effect





## THE O.O.D.A. LOOP

■ For decades, the training community used Col. Boyd's "O.O.D.A. Loop" to address decision-making and information processing during a fight. Today we use an evolved concept known as "O3R" that takes advantage of what we know about neuroscience, the power of recognition and more precise terminology for addressing reactions and responses during critical incidents.

consistently. Keeping in mind that fighting is an athletic endeavor should remind you just how important it is to not only be functionally fit but to contextualize training to use your fitness and your skills together.

### UNDERSTANDING DECISION-MAKING AND RECOGNITION-BASED ACTIONS

Several models have been formulated to describe the human decision-making process. Most of these models are loops of one form or another that chronicle the process of how an individual's interaction with his or her environment results in that individual making decisions and taking actions that affect his or her environment and lead to him or her making more decisions and taking more action. Most of these models deal with explicit decisions made over relatively long periods of time in the context of personal defense. The way most people talk about them invokes the idea of an analytical process that might involve complicated branching trees of options or checklists of potential positives or negatives for a number of potential decisions or actions. The most popular of these mod-

els over the last few decades, especially in the defensive training community, has undoubtedly been Col. Boyd's aforementioned "O.O.D.A. Loop." Just as a refresher, "O.O.D.A." stands for "Observe, Orient, Decide, Act."

I've found that language to be cumbersome in trying to get students to understand the type of stimulus-response patterns we're trying to develop for defensive situations. Although Boyd certainly understood the value of expertise and incorporated it into his own teachings, most of the instructors I've heard reference O.O.D.A. simply don't go deep enough into the concepts involved to really convey what's important to automated performance of learned skills in a fight, particularly in ambush situations. With all due respect to groundbreaking contributions from Boyd and the work of those who use his model to help others prepare to defend themselves, I believe that the model I describe here is a much better fit for our context and seems to be easier for individuals, especially those new to these concepts, to understand and use.

Given that, at the time this model was developed, almost all of my students had at least heard of Boyd's work, I refer to this approach as "the evolution of the O.O.D.A. Loop." Today, we have many more truly new students coming in to the shooting world who have no knowledge of the older model. (If you're curious, you can find volumes of writing and hours of video on Boyd's work and its many applications.) Meanwhile, let's take a look at the "O3R Model" as a better way to approach decision-making in the context of a defensive event.

For the appropriately trained person, the best loop in an ambush situation would be **O3R**:

### **Observe > React > Recognize > Respond**

Observations consist of all the information you take in — not just what you see. A loud noise, the feeling of being grabbed and all other non-perceived stimuli that your senses take in are observations; it is observations that start the cycle. When you think of creating stimulus-response patterns, however, you don't think of "analyzing the data" in the way that most people do when they first think of an observation. You need to keep in mind, especially when designing your training model and structuring your practice routines, that tying the response to the appropriate stimulus is key.

# AMBUSH RESPONSE SEQUENCE AFTER APPROPRIATE TRAINING: *OBSERVE > REACT > RECOGNIZE > RESPOND*

For instance, if you practice the mechanics of a reload without the stimulus of live-fire slide lock, when the gun runs empty in an actual fight, you're forced to cognitively analyze the failure and only then (hopefully) recognize that the situation calls for the response of a reload. If, instead, all training for the emergency reload starts with realistic, un-staged surprise of slide lock during live-fire, you'll be more likely to skip the time-consuming analytical step and proceed directly to the learned (and practiced) response of reloading your gun. This makes the whole process more efficient and shows the need for a keen appreciation of how non-cognitive observations — ones that you don't need to process at a high level because of frequent exposure — can speed your response times. This also gets you back to the preferred loop, as there is no need for an instinctive reaction because slide lock should not catch the well-trained shooter off guard. (Before you laugh, keep in mind that, within my lifetime, the leaders of the private sector training industry taught that slide lock was to be avoided on the training range.)

Ultimately, you'll want to have a way that is planned, that is trained-in, to respond to a threat, but you have to accept that you may not. There are so many variables that cannot be predicted that you must be open to the idea of getting caught without a response in place. After all, that's the ultimate premise of the counter-ambush training approach: You can't really be standing by for all possibilities. If you fail to train for a situation, you cannot capitalize on the power of recognition. What happens in the absence of recognition? You get an observation, you get your reaction — your natural, instinctive reaction — and then you improvise.

This is in the absence of training. You don't want to leave your life, or your loved ones' lives, in the hands of improvisation. You don't want to be making up what it is you need to do in the middle of your dynamic critical incident.

If your reload technique involves hitting the slide-lock lever or the slide release to send the slide forward every single time

you do a slide-lock reload, but in your actual fight (for whatever reason and however it happens), the slide ends up forward when you're reloading, you have to improvise. Maybe you've done a lot of malfunction drills, so you have a plan for what happens after you insert a magazine into your gun and go through your pattern of hitting the slide-lock lever, but don't notice that it doesn't cause a round to be chambered. You click, you tap, you rack (chambering a round), and then you can fight. That's two or three seconds you didn't need to waste in the middle of a critical incident. Maybe you do observe that the slide is forward while you insert your new magazine but you have no recognized response, so you have to improvise racking the slide. Maybe, in that case, you only lose one second of precious time.

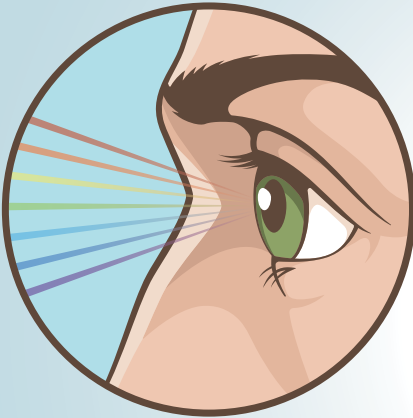
It all comes down to developing skills that make the most sense in the broadest contexts and learning to recognize what's most likely to happen. You do this so you can respond in the most efficient way in defense of self or others when necessary in that counter-ambush moment.

For the untrained or mistrained person, or for situations for which you simply haven't trained, the decision-making loop should be **O.R.I.**:

## **Observe > React > Improvise**

Improvisation shouldn't be seen as an automatic fail during the fight. In fact, many people who are untrained, or whose training wasn't appropriate to the context of their fights (such as those who were trained to shoot in the Weaver position but who improvised isosceles responses during actual counter-ambush moments) often prevail. We humans are pretty good at improvisation, but we're better when we've trained realistically to respond efficiently. So, in the "O.R.I. Loop," in the context of a truly dynamic critical incident, I believe most people either execute a learned response or improvise in place of the generic "Act" step.

■ In a counter-ambush situation, you will be using most, if not all, of your senses to collect as much information as you can. Blood in your mouth, smoke in the air, broken glass under your feet ... there is no unimportant information when you're reacting to a deadly threat.





# AMBUSH RESPONSE PATTERN BY AN UNTRAINED (OR IMPROPERLY TRAINED) PERSON: **OBSERVE > REACT > IMPROVISE**

## SO, THE EVOLUTION OF THE O.O.D.A. LOOP LOOKS LIKE THIS:

You want to respond so efficiently (via O3R) that you take your attacker out of his plan and force him into an O.R.I. Loop that you can defeat more easily. Looked at from the opposite perspective, you want to make sure that you've been planning, selecting gear and training in such a way as to prevent yourself from being overwhelmed by cognitive and non-cognitive observations with which you can't cope.

Your goal is easily met through an efficient counter-ambush training model that incorporates training in context. Context is a key component to capitalizing on everything that humans do well under stress, and the biggest component of context is the presence of the stimulus that should be eliciting the trained response. To obsess over performance in isolation from the context of intended use misses the point of learning appropriate stimulus-response pattern development. It is also important to remember that eliminating context from training often prevents you from making efficient choices in gear and techniques for the broadest range of plausible circumstances; when reality interrupts your controlled environment, you're forced to fall back into improvisation.

Think about how this model fits in to your observations of actual fights and how it relates to your training model.

Are you depending on time to analyze and make a complex decision?

Are you setting yourself up for O3R or O.R.I.?

Are you leaving stimulus response out of your training?

Col. John Boyd was a genius who bucked the system time and time again to help people understand his observations. Since he first proposed his O.O.D.A. method of looking at the problem for a specific audience, it's been morphed, co-opted and adjusted to fit a variety of contexts. There is no doubt that, when being proactive and or even planning for how to deal with a future event that is relatively slow-moving in nature (such

as the land invasion of a country or a corporate takeover), the traditional O.O.D.A. Loop will serve you well.

In the context of counter-ambush training and dynamic, chaotic lethal fights, integrating a more obvious emphasis on the power of recognition and focusing on stimulus-response patterns in your training is a natural evolution.

## PROCESSING INFORMATION DURING YOUR DRILLS

What makes counter-ambush training different from the borderline-instinctive stimulus-response training is that it requires the processing of information. Let's take a look at our most fundamental shooting drill, the "Balance of Speed & Precision Drill." All shooting is a balance of speed and precision. The precision component we call defensive accuracy; any shot that significantly affects the attacker's ability to present a lethal threat is good. The speed component is always going to be as fast as you can be combat-accurate. That said, if you're performing a rehearsed skill in isolation, you're going to be faster than you actually would be if you had to figure out what to do before you started shooting. What we see empirically is that this isn't just because of the time it takes for you to figure out what to do; it's because your brain and muscles aren't primed. You aren't visualizing, rehearsing, warming up or "in the zone" like you are in an athletic endeavor at the range.

Do bear in mind that if you're shooting as an athletic endeavor, you're going to get your stage briefing, you're going to walk through the course of fire, you're going to visualize it, and you're going to think about it: *I'm going to fire at those three targets, then I'm going to do a reload.* If you're trying to win that competition, you're absolutely going to choreograph your response; that's the point. That's the sport; that's what it's all about. If you reload at the wrong time, or if you shoot the targets out of order and take that penalty from shooting the targets in the wrong order, it puts you way behind your competitors.



■ Failing to train your physical responses while you are processing information can lead to a dependence on visual references that aren't needed and could lead to missing important information during an event ... such as your threat surrendering.

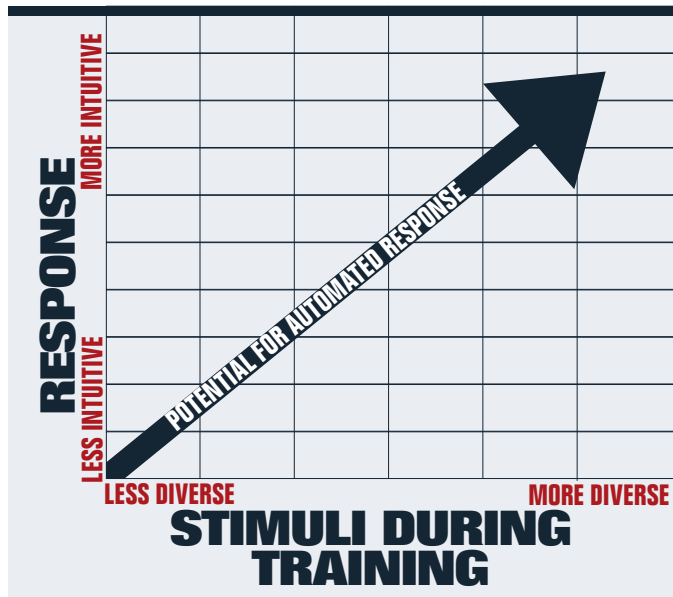
# TRAINING FOR SKILL APPLICATION

In the real world, that doesn't happen. In the real world, you see a threat and you shoot it. If you look right past seven other threats to see that one, that's the one you perceive; that's the one you're aware of and that's the one with which you deal. (Hopefully the other bad guys don't take you out of the fight before you have a chance to address them.) Only in competition settings do you hear things like, "Shoot that guy first, regardless of who you see first."

The speed and precision balance that you get would be different for a target like this versus another. Now if you think of this as the torso shot, or if you think of that

as the head shot, you know that, all else being equal, there are different balances of speed and precision necessary for each shot. Same distance, same distractions, same circumstances, whatever you want to pick, one requires a different set of skills than the other. Under the most plausible defensive shooting circumstances, one, for most people, would be a sighted-fire shot, and one would be an unsighted-fire shot. One target would probably be addressed with multiple rounds, while the other would probably be addressed with single sighted shots. You might need to fire a follow-up shot, but because of the nature of the attacker's actions, as well as your own flinching and moving and turning, you're not going to be sending strings of fire at his head. You're probably going to fire a shot, and your head is going to move, and he's going to move. You're going to have to assess the process a little bit, recognize what's going on and then decide whether or not you're going to shoot again.

The trick in a "Balance of Speed & Precision Drill" is to combine the likelihood of those two shooting situations. You know



- The more diverse your training environment, the higher your potential for intuitively automating your responses during a critical incident. Diversity in the processing of information is one of the keys to effective counter-ambush training.

one's much more likely than the other in the context of most defensive shootings, so you're going to skew your training and your practice toward more of it than the other. Maybe you'll throw another circle out here. Maybe you'll put a "1" there, and a "2" there. Maybe inside of the torso, you're going to put a high-centered chest target. Maybe, instead of a full-sized head, you're going to draw a smaller circle that represents the soft tissue you want to be able to drive a round through if you need to take a head shot.

If you think about it, we've got a huge difference between multiple shots into this larger, plausible area versus a single shot into the larger area. And now you're there waiting for your training partner to give you a command. That command could

cause you to shoot a very precisely aimed, high level of deviation shot to a small circle. And you don't know which one it's going to be, or there could be a command to just fire a multiple-shot string of fire of some random number of shots between two and five in the high-centered chest-sized area. That processing of information is what makes this a counter-ambush drill.

People often ask, "What if I don't have an instructor? What if I don't have a training partner?" That's fine; you can use technology to help you out. Get a recorder, get a little ear bud in and record a string of commands. Better yet, use an MP3 player, record separate tracks for your left and right, your 1 and 2, your "up" or "chest" or "go," whatever. What you're going to do is put that MP3 player in your pocket on shuffle, with a random play of those tracks and about four or five seconds on either side of each command; put your earmuffs over it; and walk around in a figure 8 in front of your target. When you get the command "1," turn around, recognize the "1," process that information and execute the complex motor skills that allow you to put a bullet



into the circle that contains the 1. As you're wandering around, maybe you get the command "up" that we use for a default multiple-shot string of fire to the target's chest. You get the "up" command, you recognize it, you drive out and you fire multiple shots into the chest. What you're doing is forcing yourself to process information prior to the execution of the complex motor skill. If you have a training partner or smartphone with a combat shooting app, all the better.

You can get targets with a very diverse number of designs and areas at which to shoot but, at the end of the day, a piece of cardboard with some spray-paint will work just as well. Mark smaller and larger targets, and then default to multiple shots on the larger targets and single shots on the smaller. After you find some way to simulate commands that will require you to process information before shooting, you're in business.

Maybe it's your ambient environment. Maybe you've got a semi-busy road behind you. If you hear a car coming from the left, you're going to engage the left target. If you hear a car coming from the right, you're going to engage the right target. You see a squirrel running in the woods on the left, shoot the left target. That's the kind of stuff I was doing before the system was really sophisticated. Before there was a history or training model, a lot of it was, "How can I make this more fun? How can I make this more interesting?" Target to the left, target to the right. A couple targets in the center. As soon as I would hear a car coming from the left, that would stimulate me to shoot the target on the left. Not because of the balance of speed and precision, not because of Warrior Expert Theory, but because it was fun and it worked. It helped to develop intuitive response to stimuli, which is a fancy term for good patterned responses to information coming in followed by the execution of a complex motor skill. That's what any speed and precision drill is all about: at least two commands that will elicit one of the multiple complex motor skills.

Maybe the difference in the targets is distance. Maybe the difference is contrast or size. Coming up with diverse ways to process information is a key to counter-ambush training.

■ Threat recognition on the range is almost always very easy, but remember that you may need to process much more information in the real world to find and identify threats.





CHAPTER EIGHT

# **PRIORITIZING: HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE LESS- IMPORTANT THINGS?**





“  
**CONTEXT ULTIMATELY DICTATES  
WHAT IS PLAUSIBLE FOR YOU.**  
”

**FOR A HEALTHY DEFENDER WHO SPENDS  
THE MAJORITY OF TIME STANDING:**



**Y**ou need to remember to factor in the Plausibility Principle or you will soon find yourself trying to prepare for being attacked in the dark by half a dozen cannibals while armed with only a single-action revolver chambered in .22 Long Rifle in your weak hand. Conversely, as soon as you find yourself presuming foreknowledge or time to “prepare,” make sure that you realize that you are no longer truly preparing to respond to an ambush.

What I call the “Myth of Readiness” has hindered a lot of people from being as prepared as possible for the unexpected. If you truly believe that some color code or awareness class has made it impossible for you to be caught off guard, you are actually likely to suffer most and hesitate the longest in a true ambush situation. I suggest getting over that now and accepting the real possibility that you will have to perform defensive skills on demand, without warning or even picking up on warning signs of the attack.

Within the realm of the counter-ambush training program, you have to make sure that you’re expending resources on efforts that are worth worrying about. It wouldn’t be appropriate to practice shooting aspirin tablets at 50 yards with your defensive pistol, as the need for that kind of accuracy isn’t very probable.

Ultimately, what guides your training needs to be plausibility. You can’t train for everything that is possible, so you have to settle for training for those things that are probable; that are the most likely. As you evaluate your ability to form skills to a satisfactory level and as your subjective competency reaches the appropriate level, you expand the things for which you train to include additional plausible scenarios — without straying outside the realm of situations that are reasonable to train for. It is most likely that you are going to be standing up and squared off to your threat by the time you get a gun in your hand, drive it out and need to shoot to defend yourself or others, but it is plausible to think you might be seated when you first detect a threat. If you spend 90 percent of your workday seated, your plausibility is higher for seated shooting. If you’re in a wheelchair, guess what? Seated shooting is not only plausible but also probable for you. Maybe getting knocked out of your wheelchair and lying on the ground now becomes the second-most-plausible situation for which you train.

Context ultimately dictates what is plausible for you. Your situation, your most likely threat, the type of firearm you carry, how you carry your firearm and your training resources are all



dictated by the context in which you live and operate. It's really no different than how various law enforcement agencies decide to train. Are you a rural or urban police officer? Do you carry a patrol rifle or a pump shotgun in the squad car? You may love shooting the rifle, but if you don't have one in your vehicle, that's probably not a thing you need to spend a lot of time practicing.

Same goes for those who carry a pistol. I might love shooting my 1911, but if I don't carry a 1911, then going to the range and shooting my 1911 becomes recreational shooting as opposed to training for the plausible circumstances in which I might find myself. Were I to carry a J-frame revolver, probability dictates that I'd better train with it.

Above all else, understand that you really need to be intellectually honest with yourself. You need to look at your circumstances, evaluate your needs and look at your training resources and then spend those resources as wisely as possible to develop the skills you're most likely to need. This is at the core of developing a counter-ambush training program.

## VISUALIZATION

Whenever you are training in defensive shooting skills, you should be visualizing a threat. As covered previously, visualization is known to improve the value of training and increase the likelihood that you will apply your skills as planned in an actual self-defense incident. When conducting live-fire drills, you should try to visualize appropriately based on the context for which you're practicing.

For example, if you're in the ready position, you should be imagining the scene that explains why you're in that ready position. What is the potential threat? Are you looking at someone who's brandished a knife and is threatening you? Are you barricaded in your home with your family behind you looking at a closed door? What are you visualizing at the moment that you receive your command to act and process the need to shoot? Perhaps the person with the knife starts moving toward you? Maybe the door bursts open and an armed home invader appears? If you're practicing from your holster, it makes more sense to simply visualize a setting rather than a specific threat. If you're integrating a startle reaction to simulate a counter-ambush, visualizing a threat before a command to fire is inappropriate.

You should also be visualizing the end of an attack rather than simply looking for holes in paper or counting the number



“  
**WHENEVER YOU ARE TRAINING IN DEFENSIVE SHOOTING SKILLS, YOU SHOULD BE VISUALIZING A THREAT. AS COVERED PREVIOUSLY, VISUALIZATION IS KNOWN TO IMPROVE THE VALUE OF TRAINING AND INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT YOU WILL APPLY YOUR SKILLS AS PLANNED IN AN ACTUAL SELF-DEFENSE INCIDENT.**  
”

of rounds you fire. Visualizing a threat dropping to the ground, turning to run or surrendering as you stop your string of fire is congruent with the reasons you'll stop shooting in the real world. Ultimately, training with reactive and interactive targets, using photo-realistic targets, and finding opportunities to train with qualified facilitators on video simulators can augment your square-range training and practice time.

If you have an opportunity to take a scenario-based class run by a qualified instructor with a solid support team and all of the appropriate safety gear, it can be the best way to evaluate your ability to apply your skills in context without having to imagine much at all. In the absence of working with those training tools, you can increase the reality of all of your live-fire practice simply by using the power of your mind.

### WEAK-HANDED SHOOTING SKILLS

Weak-handed shooting skills are often over-valued in sport-shooting circles. If you ever hear someone say that you should be equally skilled with both hands when it comes to pistol shooting, you might want to remind him or her that for that to be possible, you would actually have to practice more with your weak hand than with your stronger, more coordinated hand. Hopefully, that makes the individual realize that the aspiration he or she suggested doesn't really make much sense for someone simply looking to establish practical defensive shooting skills.

I recommend that students spend no more than 5 to 10 percent of their time working on one-handed or weak-handed shooting skills, including occasional weak-handed reload and malfunction-clearing practice after those skills have been developed two-handed and strong-handed. The empirical evidence from actual armed personal-defense events doesn't justify a much higher expenditure of resources.

There's no fundamental difference to shooting weak-handed; it's simply a mirror image of one-handed shooting with the strong hand. The gun should not be canted to the side or aligned differently.

Remember that in the same way you should vary the position of your weak hand while you are shooting strong-hand-only, you should vary the position of your strong hand when shooting weak-hand-only. The only reason to be shooting weak-handed

in an actual event would be that you can't use your strong hand to control the gun. If you can't control the gun with your strong hand, you shouldn't count on being able to do anything in particular with it at all.

### PROPER USE OF COVER AND CONCEALMENT

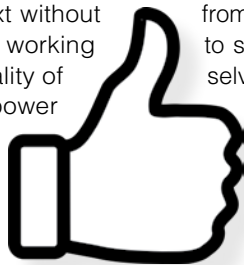
In a typical personal-defense situation outside of your home, you are unlikely to need to worry about making use of cover while shooting. If you are in a situation — such as an armed robbery incident — where you are witnessing a potential threat from behind something, chances are that you will not have to shoot. In situations where people shoot to defend themselves or others in response to attacks or threats in public, the circumstances are usually such that there is neither space nor time for use of cover as it is generally discussed or taught in tactical courses.

With the emphasis on counter-ambush responses that we have in this program, shooting around cover is considered a tertiary skill for a person who carries a concealed firearm in the public space. In the majority of circumstances under which you are able to get behind cover (or even hide behind concealment), this program advises you to stay there and not engage the threat unless (and until) it presents itself to you. Avoiding the need to shoot is a primary tactic for survival and avoiding all the potential negatives of a defensive gun use.

The circumstances inside your residence may be very different, and such situations are far more likely to involve opportunities to take advantage of cover and concealment at the moment of contact with a threat. Before we go any further though, let's define (or most likely review) technical definitions of cover and concealment and how they can be used in a strategic sense.

Concealment prevents a threat from knowing exactly where you are. We generally think of concealment in terms of blocking an attacker's line of sight, but things like camouflage, contrast and/or lighting can also effectively prevent someone from knowing exactly where you are. Concealment can be a huge advantage and shouldn't be dismissed as irrelevant. Far too often in tactical courses, the conversation about concealment's value ends where the tactics begin: Find cover, move to cover, use cover properly, cover, cover, cover.

But sometimes you don't have the option of instantly or safe-



**BUDGET PRACTICE TIME  
AND RESOURCES FOR  
STRONG-  
HANDED  
90-95%  
VERSUS  
WEAK-  
HANDED  
SHOOTING  
5-10%**

# **IS IT COVER? MAYBE.**

## **THE VARIABLES OF AMMUNITION TYPE, MATERIAL DENSITY AND ANGLE MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WHETHER OR NOT SOMETHING IS ACTUALLY COVER AND NOT JUST CONCEALMENT.**



■ Crowding your cover is never a good idea. It can create opportunities for someone to take your gun away and make it difficult for you to get into a proper shooting position if necessary.

ly getting behind cover, and concealment might be your only or better option. When might concealment be better than cover? Imagine a situation in which you can see cover, but getting to it would expose you to the threat. If you are successfully hiding from a threat or the threat isn't even aware of you, it might be a horrible idea to run out from behind that concealment to reach the cover. Think of cover as you would "evasion" and concealment as "barricading;" the former is definitely better than the latter if you get to choose without any other factors involved, but if you already have concealment or are in a good barricade position, you might be better served by staying put than by exposing yourself to harm in an attempt to seek out the other alternative.

Cover protects you from being harmed by the attacker; imagine a medieval knight's suit of armor protecting him from damage that could be inflicted by an attacker's sword. Specifically, imagine that imposing medieval knight in heavy armor towering over a scrawny, malnourished pirate wearing shorts and a T-shirt and holding a thin rapier. The smaller combatant could likely swing at the knight, trying to cut through the armor until he collapsed from exhaustion, and the knight wouldn't feel a thing (except possibly a ringing in his ears). This would be like you jumping into a steel dumpster while someone across the street shot at you with a pocket gun chambered in .25 ACP. Your ears might be ringing also, but you wouldn't have to worry about getting shot.

Now, if that knight wasn't paying attention and his attacker changed tactics — maybe thrust the tip of the rapier into a gap between armor plates or even the slit in his helmet's visor — he could easily be killed, and the same is true for cover in a defensive shooting situation. If you get complacent or your attacker gets creative, you could quickly be exposed to grave danger. Using cover in a dynamic situation can be as much art as it is science, and identifying whether something's even cover at all might be the easiest part of the process.

You have a number of advantages inside your home during a defensive event because you know the terrain. You should also





■ Don't "crowd your cover." It is actually harder to use cover or concealment efficiently if you are too close to it. It will also be easier for someone coming around a corner to hurt you if you are within an arm's reach of it. Being back from a corner can also give you more time to process who is coming around the corner and how you need to respond.

be able to quickly recognize what in your home is cover if a threat armed with a typical handgun, rifle or shotgun invites himself over:

- **Drywall:** *No*
- **Densely Packed Bookshelf:** *Yes*
- **Typical Interior Doors:** *No*
- **Exterior "Class 1" Steel or Fiberglass Doors:** *No*
- **Typical Furniture:** *No*
- **Mattresses:** *Almost Certainly Not*
- **Refrigerator:** *No*
- **Jugs of Milk in Your Refrigerator:** *Maybe for One Shot*
- **A Frozen Turkey in Your Refrigerator:** *Yes*
- **A Hallway Corner with Typical 2x4 Construction:** *Maybe*
- **Section of Wall with ¼" Mild Steel Plate**
  - **Pistols:** *Probably*
  - **Rifles:** *Probably Not*
  - **Shotguns:** *Yes*
- **Solid Hardwood Table, Flipped Over on Its Side**
  - **Pistol:** *Possibly*
  - **Rifle:** *Probably Not*
  - **Shotgun:** *Maybe*

Many people are surprised by the number of "no" answers at first, perhaps because they've seen too many movies with characters surviving attacks by ducking behind couches while being shot at by masked bad guys with automatic weapons. The fact is that bullets can be pretty hard to stop, and the kind of *structural* integrity that houses and furniture need is very different from the kind of *strength* needed to stop bullets. The next thing that throws many people off about that list is the large number of answers that aren't really clear. "Possibly" doesn't really help and "probably not" doesn't inspire much confidence either.

The world is a complex place and, without knowing the exact particulars of the furniture, rifle, shotgun, pistol and ammunition, it is impossible to give a clear answer. Even with those answers, the angle at which the rounds strike might be a factor, as might the way certain wooden parts are connected to one another. Since you may not know if something is cover or not until after an attacker's round penetrates it, you are forced into the position of treating anything that is not obviously cover as concealment. But, as noted earlier, that doesn't mean it is useless to you.

I highly recommend treating "maybe cover" or even simple concealment as cover for the purposes of your shooting techniques when you are behind it and need to shoot. First of all, the threat

may think you are behind cover and take more time to shoot at you, trying to hit only what he can see, a phenomenon I refer to as “behavioral cover.” It’s been documented in several police-officer-involved shootings: A threat has tried to shoot around things like an officer’s hands or a ticket book because of his or her laser focus on wanting to shoot the officer’s head or body. For efficiency in discussing the physical aspects of shooting and positioning around, over or under things, I will speak about shooting around cover, even though the techniques are no different than were I discussing the edge of concealment.

When you position yourself behind cover, try to be at least two arms’ length away from the corner. This will make it harder for anyone coming around the cover toward you to affect your ability to stop him or her, and it will give you a reactionary gap to respond if someone who is not a threat decides to come around the corner and surprise you.

When shooting around cover, you want to maximize your use of that cover when it comes to defeating your threat. When standing, this means that you will very likely be in an off-balance shooting position, leaning out to the side so that your lower body is completely behind the edge of cover relative to your threat. You achieve that by leaning out past the foot that is toward the outside of cover. You should try to remain as vertical as possible while you lean out, keeping your gun in the high compressed ready position and under your eye-line as you lean.

Use of cover in the public space holds true to the principles of positioning and shooting technique covered above. As mentioned, the nature of defensive shooting outside your home makes it less likely that cover will play a role — unless you’re barricaded during some type of violent event or you are moving while armed to evacuate an area or secure someone you need to protect. Though possible, such situations are much less common outside of your home.

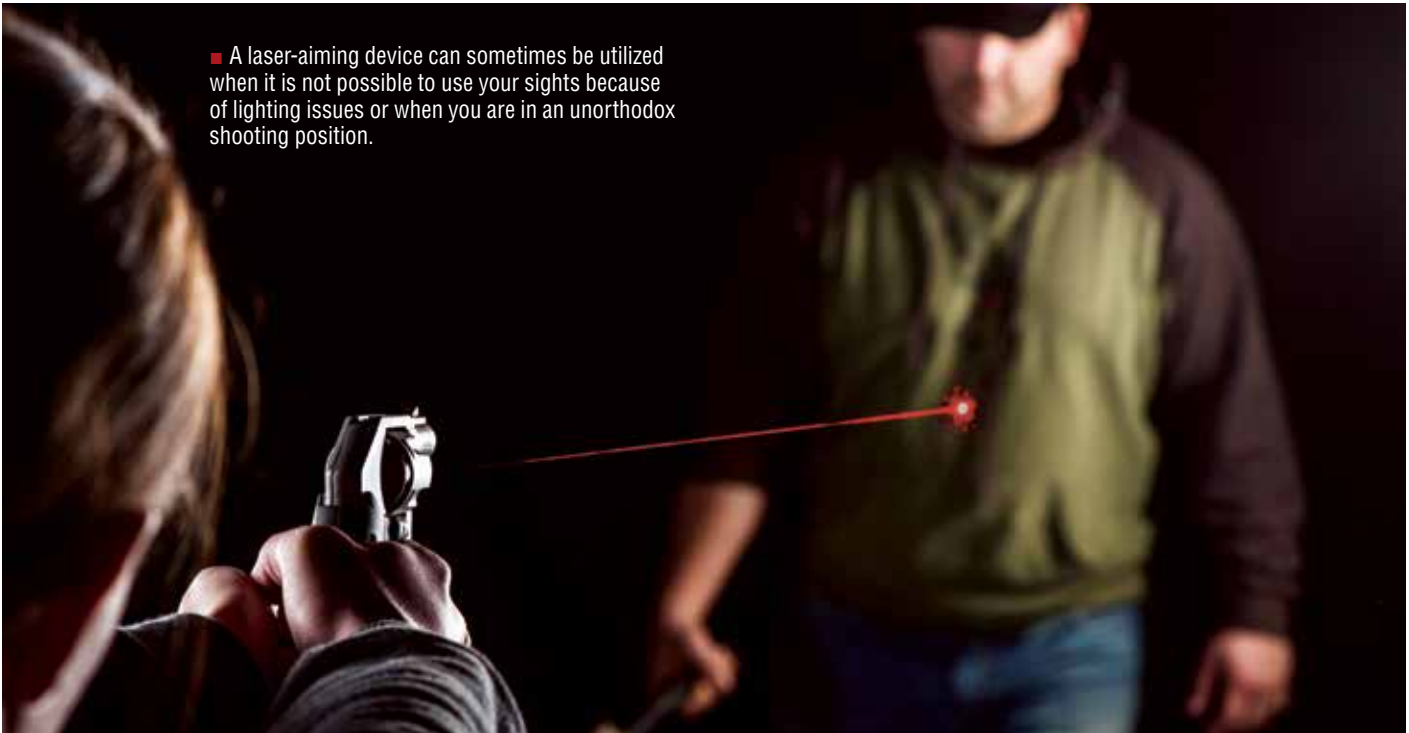
## LASER-AIMING DEVICES

A laser mounted on a defensive firearm provides a tertiary aiming method that can be particularly useful in some unorthodox defensive shooting situations. While I would never suggest that every defensive firearm needs a laser, I would also be unlikely to discourage you from mounting one on a gun after you’ve established fundamental defensive shooting skills using both kinesthetic and sighted-fire techniques. That said, it is vital that you not see a laser-aiming device as a replacement for either of those aiming methods.



■ Keeping a handgun in a high compressed ready position (with the muzzle pointed down) as you move through your home will maximize your control while minimizing the chances you might negligently shoot the wrong person.

■ A laser-aiming device can sometimes be utilized when it is not possible to use your sights because of lighting issues or when you are in an unorthodox shooting position.



Some people might be tempted to use a laser as a primary aiming device, but this inevitably causes a compromise in the position of a handgun in your extended shooting position. Consider that it is virtually impossible to see the small laser dot on a target at close range when you are in a proper extended handgun shooting position. The dot will be just a few millimeters wide at most, and the arms, hands or the gun itself should obstruct its view. Compromising this position by raising the head over the gun affects your ability to naturally align the gun, control recoil and use your sights.

There are three situations in which a laser can significantly increase your ability to control deviation:

**1.** A laser can be useful in situations in which you cannot get your gun into a proper extended shooting position in your line of sight (when you are injured or the movement of the gun is otherwise blocked, for example). With the gun out of your line of sight, a laser might be the only reliable way of predicting where your bullet will go.



**2.** When shooting in a compressed position but outside of contact distance, a laser can provide an invaluable aiming option. Compressed-position shooting is preferable to fully extending the gun any time a threat is within two arms' reach or about to be (when an attacker is charging you, for example). Compressing the gun prevents the threat from affecting your ability to use the gun against him or her, but, outside of contact distance, it is hard to be sure that your gun is aligned with a vital area of the threat without the use of a laser.

**3.** In a situation where lighting and/or contrast issues prevent you from establishing sight alignment and/or a sight picture, a laser may be the only option you have for accurately predicting where your bullets will go. Any situation in which your front or rear sight is damaged in a way that makes it useless also falls into this category.

There are a few things you should consider before mounting a laser on a defensive firearm:

**1.** A green laser is almost always going to be easier to see than a red one, especially against dark surfaces, at longer ranges or in brighter lighting conditions.



2. A laser will only be “zeroed” to the exact point of impact at one distance.

3. Whenever possible, the positioning of the laser-aiming device on a rifle should be above or below the barrel, not beside it.

4. An “instant-on” laser with a very efficient activation switch is the only type that should be considered for a defensive firearm.

## **A SPREE KILLER OR ‘ACTIVE SHOOTER’ SITUATION**

Some number of years ago, I defined “defensive accuracy” as any shot that significantly affects an attacker’s ability to present a lethal threat. When you look at defensive shooting skill development on a live-fire range, you must acknowledge that some people get peripheral hits on attackers that result in those attackers stopping their attacks. Many attackers even stop their attacks after merely being shot at and not even being hit. You also must acknowledge that you will never know just how many attackers were persuaded to change their actions simply because good guys brandished firearms without ever firing them.

It’s vital to stay focused on the fact that you’re not generally training for situations that can be solved without shooting, and you can’t count on an attacker changing his or her mind because of fear or halting his or her attack after being grazed by one of your rounds. You must assume that if you need to draw your gun, you will need to shoot, and that if you need to shoot, you need to cause enough physical damage to the threat that he or she is incapable of continuing his or her attack, regardless of motivation. If you don’t believe that you can and will fire a round that strikes your threat in an area that will cause significant physical damage, you generally shouldn’t fire your gun. By saying this, what I mean is that you should fire with the expectation of defensive accuracy in virtually all plausible personal-defense events.

A spree killer, or an “active shooter” as he or she is most often called — even an unarmed one — presents a unique situation that can create an exception to the physical-effect rule. The empirical evidence reveals that, in the vast majority of cases, spree killers either retreat or take their own lives in the face of any armed resistance. For this reason, I advise you to consider engaging a spree killer outside of the conditions

where your expectations are a guaranteed hit to a vital area. Before going any further with this concept, I will clearly state that you should never fire a shot if you perceive any significant chance that you could harm a bystander, nor am I advocating that you fire a “warning shot” at any time. Firing a gun is a use of lethal force, regardless of how you might articulate your intentions after the fact.

Those stipulations made, I do believe that there is a narrowly defined set of conditions under which you might reasonably and responsibly fire your gun at a spree killer even though you know the chances of scoring a vital hit are low.

Imagine a situation in which you’re a long distance from the threat: 50, 75 or even 100 yards away from a threat not in a crowd. Imagine this scenario with the threat standing alone in front of a hillside or a brick wall with no windows in the vicinity. If the threat were shooting at you, a crowd you were in or at people in another direction, you might feel compelled to act, particularly if you had family members or others you cared to defend in the crowd being attacked.

How long does it take you to run 25 yards? How about 40 or 75 yards? How long would it take you to get to a distance and position from which you would be 100 percent confident you could fire a shot into a vital area of the threat? If you sprinted that far, would you actually be able to apply enough skill, or would you have to get even closer because of your

heavy breathing and elevated heart rate? More importantly, how many shots can the threat fire at you or others during that time? At four to six shots per second, you could empty a magazine from a semi-automatic pistol before a typical professional athlete could cover 50 yards. That’s a lot of potential damage that might be prevented if you were able to safely fire a shot at the threat. That shot might not cause physical damage but almost certainly would affect the threat psychologically.

In 2012, a spree killer was shooting people in a mall in Oregon. At one point, the shooter paused his attack (presumably reloading or trying to clear a malfunction of his rifle) and a good guy with a gun came out from behind concealment, brandished his gun and challenged the killer. The killer ran away and shortly thereafter took his own life before law enforcement made contact with him. The responding SWAT officers credited the armed citizen with stopping the killer.

“  
**DEFENSIVE ACCURACY:  
ANY SHOT THAT  
SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTS  
THE THREAT’S ABILITY TO  
HURT YOU.**  
”

In the aftermath, the citizen stated that he had no intention of shooting because he wasn't sure of the background or his ability to hit the threat at the distance involved. In this case, the armed citizen acted very bravely and was, in fact, a hero. While I do not ever recommend brandishing a firearm and threatening to shoot when you truly have no intention to, it worked that day and is a clear example of the principle that underlies the tactic I'm suggesting here. If I didn't make this clear exception, our doctrine would seem to universally condemn ever pulling the trigger without the expectation of hitting one of your threat's vital areas. This is an example of the bottom-line truth of the definition of defensive accuracy: A hit (much less a vital hit) isn't always necessary.

That said, under such circumstances, you must have an incredibly low perceived penalty for a miss; in fact, that value should be approaching zero. Should you eventually be closer to the threat, you will have fewer rounds in a situation in which you're confident you can send a vital hit. You might draw attention to yourself. A bystander might not realize what you are trying to do and think you are the spree killer or an accomplice. If you believe that there is any measurable chance that your rounds could harm anyone other than the threat, do not shoot.

You might wonder why I am taking so much time and space to cover such an unlikely circumstance, but the fact is that spree-killer attacks create a disproportionate amount of conversation. In fact, isolated events of rapid mass murder conducted by religious fanatics, political terrorists, racists and the mentally ill get far more attention than they deserve — especially in regard to personal-defense preparation. But because of all that attention, I believe that many armed people in the U.S. misunderstand the value of guns in typical spree-killing situations and how they might best employ firearms should they find themselves in the midst of such. Honestly, I think some people have delusions of gran-

deur with regard to their abilities to responsibly use firearms during typical spree-killer events and fundamental misunderstandings of how the circumstances of these events preclude the use of firearms in any responsible way. The nature of the rapid mass murder in a crowded place means you would be best served by getting yourself and your loved ones away from the attack, barricading as quickly as possible or attempting to physically engage the attacker. Such a murderer usually initiates his or her attack at very close range to his or her victims and under circumstances where drawing and firing a gun would present as much danger to bystanders as to the threat.

In all other cases where you would use a gun, the fact that you happened to be caught in the midst of a rapid mass murder would have nothing to do with the tactics or techniques you employ. The shooting circumstances would be indistinguishable from other much more likely personal-defense events in your home or in the public space.

## ARMING YOURSELF IN A HOME-DEFENSE SITUATION

Retrieving your gun from your staging area and preparing it for use is something you should be planning for. Even if you carry a gun on your body while you are inside your home, you should think carefully about where and how you will stage your defensive firearm and any other guns you're not wearing. Other members of your household may be authorized to use firearms in a defensive situation, or you may choose to have additional firearms, such as rifles or shotguns, staged for your own use. The concepts in this section generally apply to handguns and long guns.

There's a difference between staging and storing firearms. After you've made the decision to have firearms in your home for the defense of yourself or your family in the worst-case scenario, one of the first things you have to deal with is where and how you're going to stage those firearms.

But first you need to determine how you will store firearms in the home. Are you going to keep them secured? Are you going



■ Larger safes are very useful for storing lots of firearms and can be very secure, but they are usually not the best choice for staging firearms intended to be used during an emergency.

# KNOW AND FOLLOW THE LOCAL LAWS THAT GOVERN HOW YOU CAN STORE FIREARMS AND AMMO WHERE YOU LIVE.

to keep them in a safe, or do you not have to worry about unauthorized access inside of your home? Do you live alone or with others? Do you live in a place where laws direct how you must store your firearms and/or ammunition?

After you've met any location-based legal obligations, staging firearms for home defense is a balance of accessibility and prevention of unauthorized access. "Unauthorized access" is any access to the firearms by those not specifically allowed by you. This could be someone untrained in responsible gun-handling or someone trained but whom you do not yet fully trust. (Obviously, this list also includes criminals who intend to steal your firearms or hurt you with them.)

Securing firearms from unauthorized access by individuals you allow into your home may be harder than securing the firearms from intruders. When you are thinking about safeguarding your firearms from an intruder, you have many extra layers of physical security and pressures of time and consequences working in your favor. When it comes to a curious roommate or undisciplined child, he or she likely has much more time and access to your storage locations. For someone who believes that you trust and care for him or her, there may also be a lower perception of consequences for getting caught. A thief has real reason to fear getting caught in the act; your unruly child or curious roommate may believe you "won't really care" if you find out that he or she was accessing your firearms without permission.



■ A firearm isn't the only thing you want to stage for home defense. Consider staging a flashlight and extra ammunition as well.

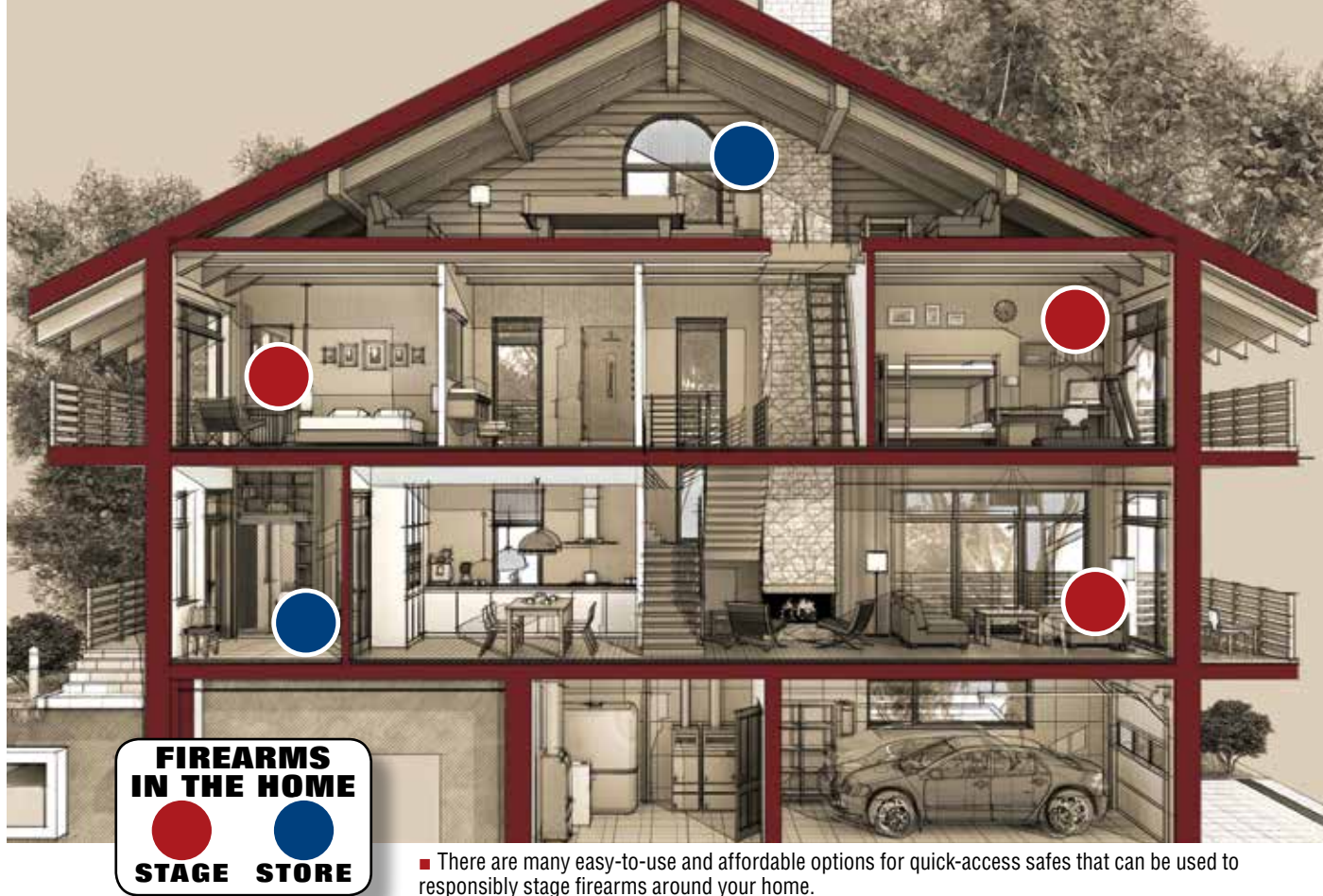
your firearms and ammunition in two distinctly different locations in your home, you'll be hard-pressed to consider them available for home defense in a dynamic surprise-attack scenario like a home invasion.

Simply keeping a home-defense firearm in a soft-sided or plastic case might be one of the worst actions you could take with that gun. Placing a gun inside of one of these containers does little or nothing to secure it from unauthorized access, and since most people will recognize such a container for exactly what it is, it can't even be said to "hide" the gun. A metal rifle or handgun case might offer slightly more security, but if it locks, the lock is inevitably of the fine-motor, combination or small-key variety and not a great choice for securing a firearm that may need to be accessed quickly.

Remember that "staging" is different from "storing." Storage is a possible long-term solution for guns that you are not planning on using (possibly for years). If you're thinking that a gun may

Unless you live alone, these issues surrounding trusted people who aren't authorized to access firearms must be factored into your decisions regarding how to stage those firearms. Even if you do live alone, you still have people whom you allow into your home from time to time, including guests and service personnel. Most people would agree that simply leaving your firearms loaded and lying around in the open is a mistake. Similarly, I am of the opinion that if you store





be used for home defense, then you must stage it. If you have a combination safe — a safe that has a keyed lock or small buttons that need to be pressed in sequence — it would be hard to consider such an arrangement appropriate for home defense. If you're familiar with handgun holsters, picture an old canvas flap holster from World War II, the type that required several steps to get the gun out of and was very hard to conceal. Storing a home-defense gun in a large combination safe would be the equivalent of choosing that holster for your concealed carry defensive handgun. Could it work? Well, sure, maybe. But that doesn't make it a good idea for someone who's serious about planning.

Other less-optimal choices for securing home-defense guns include trigger locks and cable locks. While these devices can prevent unauthorized people from loading and firing guns, they're relatively slow and clumsy to remove, require extrane-

ous fine-motor-skill activity during your incident and do nothing to secure your firearms from theft. With enough time and access, these types of locks are very easily defeated.

When it comes to securing a staged home-defense firearm, my bottom-line, best-practice recommendation is always going to be a quick-access safe. While these safes of varying quality and efficiency are available from any number of manufacturers, I've recommended GunVault products for many years. I've tested these safes extensively and find them to be the highest quality and most reliable safes of their kind. In the interest of full disclosure, I did agree to be a spokesperson for GunVault in 2013; likewise, they've sponsored many of my projects over the years. This relationship exists because I've been a fan of their products and have recommended them longer than I've done business with them; it's important to understand which came first.



Similarly, I added Tactical Walls clandestine staging areas to my home-defense plan a few years ago, and I am now proud to have them involved with my projects as well. Shelves, mirrors, tables and other furniture items from Tactical Walls allow you to keep firearms and other emergency gear at the ready, somewhat “hidden in plain sight.” These furniture products unlock via magnetic or RFID keys and can be installed and painted to match virtually any home or office environment.

Regardless of the brand you choose, some type of secure container, with large buttons and a relatively simple/short sequence that you can remember or a simple magnetic, RFID or reliable biometric scanner, is an outstanding investment for a home-defense gun. Most models are designed for handguns only, but some will accommodate

■ Loaded guns don’t replace common sense. Barricading with your family and waiting for the police to respond when you have an intruder is often the best tactic. Avoiding a confrontation is far better than needing to shoot someone. Upgrading interior doors and locks is a home-defense fundamental.

shotguns or rifles well. I also recommend keeping a flashlight, medical equipment, spare ammunition and other emergency items with your firearm.

The last consideration in regard to staging your firearm is whether or not to keep it loaded. Unless we’re talking about a revolver, there is also a sub-consideration of whether or not you are going to have a round chambered in the action of the gun, ready to be fired. This is a crucial decision and one that may not have as

obvious an answer as you think.

On the one hand, some may say that you should never have a gun loaded that isn’t in your immediate control. Others might say that you should always have your defensive gun loaded and ready or it is useless.



■ Simply leaving your firearms and related equipment lying around the house in the open is rarely a responsible option or even tactically optimal.

“Always” and “never” are big words, and I try to avoid them. As I’ve mentioned before, there may be laws that govern how you can store firearms and ammunition where you live; those laws must be a guiding force in your decisions.

The specifics of what condition you secure your firearm in would most likely be the next most important factor. If you have your firearm locked in a quick-access safe, having it loaded may be just fine. If your defensive firearm isn’t secured, you really have to pause before you decide to keep it loaded, let alone chambered. Who has access to your home? Who might get access to that firearm? Finally, don’t lose sight of the scenarios in which you may have to use your staged defensive firearm, and consider how much of an advantage keeping it loaded and chambered really provides.

First, let’s look at how much time it actually takes to load your defensive firearm and how much time it takes to chamber a round. If you have a semi-automatic rifle or pistol, it should take

you less than two seconds to insert a magazine and chamber a round. If you double that due to stress, distraction or any number of other factors, you’re still at only four seconds. If you have the magazine inserted, it should take you, at most, a second to chamber a round after your hand is on the gun, and you can do this while bringing the gun to your ready position or even while moving it to a shooting position. After all, some people advocate carrying a gun without a round in the chamber. While I certainly don’t agree with them, they do regularly demonstrate just how quickly even an un-chambered gun can be brought into action by anyone who practices the technique. Naturally, if you are using a pump- or semi-automatic shotgun or a lever-action rifle, the times would be about the same to chamber, but it takes much longer to load. Loading a double-barreled shotgun can be done quickly (just look at what the Cowboy Action shooters do), but that is a harder skill to acquire than loading a magazine into a semi-automatic.



Second, let's look at the likely scenarios under which you might have to use a staged home-defense firearm. It will need to be a scenario in which you have time to get to the gun and get it into a ready position. Why? As you continue reading this book, you'll find that things change dramatically when you are within two arms' reach. In those scenarios, even when you're carrying a gun, I don't recommend going to a firearm as your immediate defensive option. Using unarmed skills or simply fighting to get control of your attacker's weapon should be a priority over trying to draw a gun (much less pull one out of a staged location) while someone is actively trying to hurt you.

In other words, if you picture yourself running through the house with the bad guy right on your heels and doing some kind of dive-roll onto your gun box, opening it while rolling across the floor and then coming up to a kneeling position with the gun in your hand just in time to shoot the threat right between the eyes as he's about to stick you with a knife, well, let's reframe that. If the bad guy is hot on your heels with a knife, you need to be fighting. Getting stabbed in the back doesn't seem like a good idea, and if the bad guy in question is strong, smart and fast enough to get into your home and be posing a direct threat, there's no reason to assume that you're suddenly going to be able to outrun him.

Even if you can outrun the threat, when you actually get to your gun, there's going to need to be some portion of time in which you have enough control to actually get that gun into your hand and oriented toward the threat, preferably at extension, and fire it. Looking at the big picture, you're much better off using some portion of time to barricade yourself, if possible. If you're reading this book in order to put together a feasible plan of action and you can set up a defensible position with a staged defensive firearm, I'd recommend you include a deadbolt on the reinforced door of the room in which you have your firearm staged.

It takes very little time to slam a door and turn a lock. Investing that small amount of time *gives* you time to get into position, time to ready your gun and time to prepare for the attacker to break through your barricade. If the attacker can't instantly smash through your reinforced door, you might even be able to make a call to the police to start them on the way. If the threat is actively trying to break through the door, you can also let him know that you're armed and ready to defend yourself.

A much better scenario for armed home defense would put you in the location of your staged firearm before the threat is with you. Granted, you can't assume that you'll be fighting on your

own terms, but you can take actions to make it as hard as possible for the threat to reach you. Physical home security, being cautious about who you let into your home, having a response plan ahead of time and enacting it when your precursor cues appear — all of these will set you up for the best possible fight, if and when you need to actively defend yourself with a firearm. They'll also do much to buy you that extra one or two seconds needed to load your firearm or chamber a round. Ultimately, it may be an excellent idea to leave your firearm loaded but unchambered or even to stage it with the magazine removed but next to the gun.

If your firearm is secured in any type of locked container, I see nothing wrong with keeping it loaded and ready, so long as the trigger is covered and everyone with access to the firearm knows that it is in that condition. You can keep the gun in a holster (preferably a paddle type that can be easily put on in an emergency) or stage the loaded gun with a trigger guard of some kind. If you can, anchor the trigger guard so that it's left behind when you grip the gun properly and pull it out of your secure staging area; that way, your gun is safe to grab in an emergency or in the dark and is instantly ready, as if you had drawn it from your carry holster. Staging a holster already on a belt that can be quickly put on, even without belt loop or pants, if needed, is also a good idea. Most quick-access safes meant for staging defensive guns will not accommodate such large setups, but you can stage your "battle belt" nearby.

If you are staging your defensive firearm in a safe with other guns and they are not all loaded, you need a way of distinguishing one set from the other. Perhaps all of the non-staged guns can be in soft cases inside the safe. Maybe your defensive gun will be alone on one side or on one shelf. Some gun safes come with specific pouches, straps or sections marked for loaded/defensive firearms.

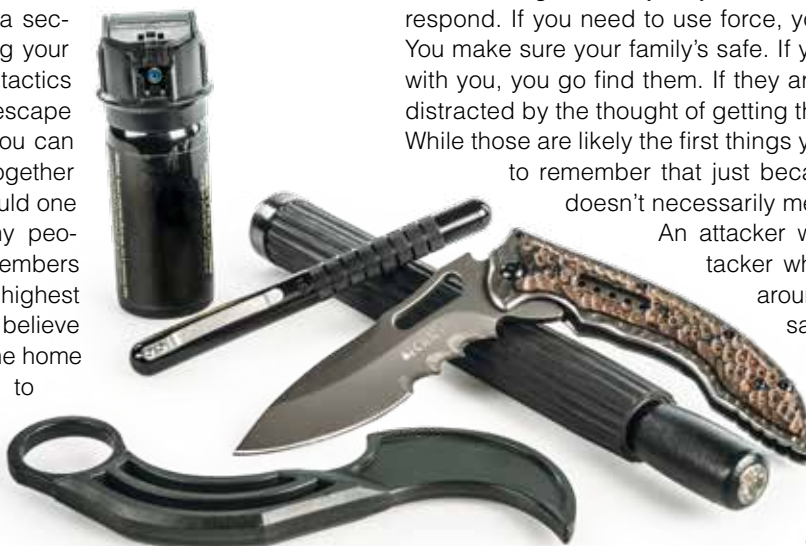
Whether or not you decide to keep your home-defense firearm loaded is ultimately your decision, and it is an area in which there is no solid right or wrong answer. I've done both, and my decisions always depended on the circumstances under which I was living at the time. While you cannot deny the slight advantage to keeping your gun loaded, there's definitely a much higher risk level if you cannot absolutely control access. My final word on this topic will be one of warning against complacency: Regardless of whether you believe your gun to be loaded or unloaded, always check it to be sure that it is actually in the condition you need it to be.

Arming yourself means specifically obtaining a defensive tool and preparing it for use. This applies to any type of tool, whether it is something specifically intended to be used for defense, such as a gun, knife or chemical spray, or something being pressed into use as an improvisation, such as a chair, frying pan or fire extinguisher. With a firearm, exactly what you will need to do to prepare it for use will depend on how you've staged it.

In a home-defense situation, arming yourself will typically be a secondary priority after improving your position. If you can use the tactics of evading or barricading to escape or delay your attacker first, you can avoid a physical conflict altogether or improve your chances should one become inevitable. For many people, securing other family members will be a high — if not the highest — priority; parents who truly believe there is a violent attacker in the home will almost always choose to move toward their children over moving toward any staged guns with which to arm themselves. Personally, I know that would likely be my own response, and I

am skeptical that any other parent would act differently in the heat of the moment. For this reason, many parents choose to stage defensive tools in or near their children's rooms. If you're a parent, imagine finding yourself in your children's room (with them safe for the moment) and then realizing that the physical threat is between you and your staged firearm.

While we define a "defensive tool" as anything that increases your ability to stop the threat your attacker presents, this book is specifically focused on the use of a defensive handgun. I recommend a handgun as the preferred home-defense firearm for most people, and I keep several staged for my own primary use as well. Long guns certainly have a place in the discussion, and I have them staged also for specific situations. For more information on long guns in the context of armed home defense, consult *Concealed Carry and Home Defense Fundamentals*, available through the USCCA's online store at [usconcealedcarry.com/store](http://usconcealedcarry.com/store).



## THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE USE OF DEFENSIVE FORCE

The immediate aftermath of an attack in your home is a critical time for which you need to plan ahead. Remember that just because the attacker's down doesn't mean that your fight is necessarily over. This is something that often gets overlooked when you think about your home-defense plan. When an invader gains entry to your residence, you react and you respond. If you need to use force, you put that invader down. You make sure your family's safe. If your family isn't right there with you, you go find them. If they are right there, you may be distracted by the thought of getting them away from the scene. While those are likely the first things you'll want to do, you need to remember that just because the bad guy's down doesn't necessarily mean that the fight is over.

An attacker who goes down or an attacker who turns around and runs around a corner isn't necessarily gone. Sometimes an attacker returns to attack again, sometimes he or she gets back up to resume the attack, and sometimes he or she has friends. An attacker who seems to flee might only run around the corner

and stage for another attack or be waiting to see if you're going to come out of that bedroom or barricade area. He or she might even wait until you come out of your house to try to get in a vehicle. Just because an attacker's down doesn't mean you can let your guard down. You want to keep your firearm at the ready; you want to keep your eyes on that threat. Don't approach the threat. You don't need to "secure the weapon," nor do you need to try to "take someone into custody." What you need to do is keep your eyes on that threat, continue to try to contact law enforcement, try to get out of the area through another exit if you can and, if applicable, take your family with you.

You also need to worry about multiple attackers. You could have a multiple-attacker home-invasion situation, but you might have only seen one invader when there were others coming in through another entrance or waiting out on your front porch. Other attackers may only make entry after shots are fired. Remember, multiple attackers are always a possibility.

# **AFTER A DEFENSIVE SHOOTING INCIDENT:**

- 1) MAKE SURE THE ATTACK IS REALLY OVER**
- 2) INITIATE MEDICAL TREATMENT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY AS NEEDED**
- 3) PREPARE FOR THE ARRIVAL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS**

Your next primary concern is a medical assessment. Are you injured? Is any member of your family injured? When you stage a phone, lights, defensive firearms, ammunition, body armor or anything else that's part of your personal protection plan, make sure that you include medical equipment. Stage items like compression bandages, at least one tourniquet and some type of hemostatic agent, which is always a major plus to have on hand.

The reality is that if you're in a deadly force situation, you're defending against a forceful attack, and that attack might end up successful. In fact, that forceful attack might have already been perpetrated against you and your family, and only now are you finally able to stop the threat. Just as in your use of a firearm, emergency first aid is something in which you should be trained.

The first level of action in the immediate aftermath is making sure the attack is really over. The second is initiating medical care for you and your family as needed, and the third is dealing with law enforcement when they respond.

Remember, you want to make sure that you don't get shot and that you don't end up shooting any police officers when they're coming in to protect you and your family. You need to cooperate with them and make sure that they understand that you're not a threat. If you've got a firearm in your hand when they arrive, that needs to change. Place it on a table or other surface in plain sight, well outside of your arm's reach. In a holster, with your hand extended away from it is also a good option that allows you to maintain more control over the gun and who has access to it. In this case, be prepared for the officers to take the gun out of the holster from you, possibly after securing you in handcuffs. Allowing them to follow their training and procedures should make the entire experience easier and safer for you and your family.

After the attack is over and the guns are put away, you're going to be interviewed by the police. You might even find yourself being put into custody. You might even find yourself charged with a crime.

After you get those handcuffs put on you and you're being advised of your right to remain silent, and after you're being told that you're being charged with a crime, that's the time to stop

talking. Before those handcuffs get put on, or at least before you get formally arrested for a crime, that's the time you have to explain to the officers exactly what happened. There are several things that you're going to want to explain to the officers.

You'll want to make sure they understand that a violent attack was perpetrated against you. If the police come in, there's someone lying on your floor and you have a firearm in your hand, the only crime that those officers have obvious evidence of is you shooting another human being.

You're going to need to point out things like:

"Here's where he broke through the window."

"Here's where he kicked in my door."

"There's his weapon."

You're going to need to show any damage that was done to you and any injuries to family members. Maybe you're going to point to footprints on your bedroom door where the attacker was trying to kick his way through your barricade. The evidence of the attack, the evidence of the assault, the evidence of the threat and the evidence of crimes perpetrated by the attacker are all things that you need to point out. If you think that there are witnesses to the attack, you need to immediately point them out as well. Maybe a neighbor in an adjoining apartment was on the other side of the wall and heard the screaming. Make sure that the police talk to that person.

However you do it, you need to make sure the police officers understand there was a crime, there was a threat, there is evidence, there are witnesses and that you're the best witness to explain all of it. The old cliché about not talking to the police may leave them without the information they need to decide that you acted appropriately and to not charge you with a crime. Remember these things in the immediate aftermath of an assault inside your home and make explaining them part of your home-defense drills.





CHAPTER NINE

# **MOVING WHILE ARMED & USE OF COVER**



If you're armed with a handgun and need to move through your home or any other space, there are some fundamental considerations you must internalize for optimal success (I've prioritized these based on the probability of what you might face):

- Not injuring yourself or anyone else who does not pose a threat to you or your family.
- Not having your firearm taken from you.
- Being able to use your firearm swiftly and efficiently against a threat.

That order is based on my experiences and observations over the last two decades of working within the world of armed professionals and firearms owners, as well as from my perspective as a security consultant, police officer, personal-defense educator and defensive shooting instructor (as well as being an armed homeowner myself). I strongly believe that your primary focus should be on controlling your gun while moving in a way that minimizes the chances of you misusing or losing control of it. In reality, the chance that you'll need to shoot a threat when you hear something "go bump in the night" or even when your alarm is going off, the dog is barking or family members are screaming is incredibly low. When that fact is positioned next to the multiple times a year we read about a family member tragically shooting another family member or authorized visitor, I think you will start to understand the priority.

Factor in the number of times that people who actually do shoot intruders do so when they're not in direct peril — shootings in defense of property rather than in defense of life — and those who've chosen to "hunt" for intruders in direct opposition to the tactics of this program, and the order should make even more sense. If you're moving through your house while armed, it should be for one of two reasons:

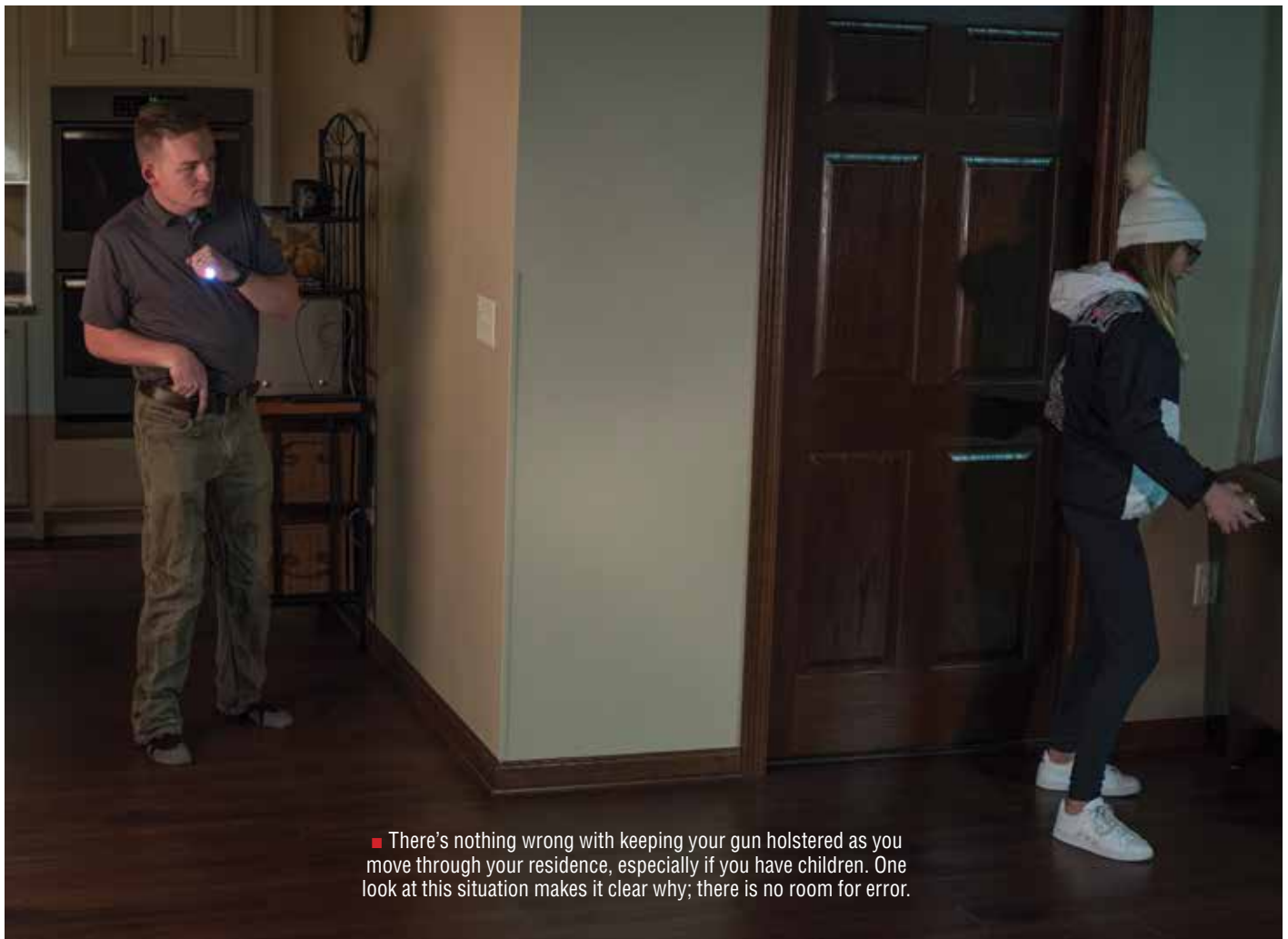
- 1) To secure other household members**
- 2) To escape or get to a barricaded/improved position**

In the first case, you will be consciously moving toward your loved ones. Under these circumstances, it is best to have your handgun in a holster, if possible. If you've staged your defensive handgun with a holster as recommended, it should be of a type that can be quickly put on: a paddle type or a holster that is already attached to a belt that is easy to put on. As you move through the residence, you should maintain your strong hand on



■ Moving around your home in the dark with a gun drawn is a recipe for disaster if the person making the noise is a family member or other authorized person.





■ There's nothing wrong with keeping your gun holstered as you move through your residence, especially if you have children. One look at this situation makes it clear why; there is no room for error.

**IF YOU'RE MOVING THROUGH YOUR HOUSE WHILE ARMED, IT SHOULD BE FOR ONE OF TWO REASONS:**

- 1) TO SECURE OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS**
- 2) TO ESCAPE OR GET TO A BARRICADED/IMPROVED POSITION**



the gun in the staged position, or with your hand on the gun in a way that gives you as much of your firing grip as possible. In this position, any retention devices on your holster should be defeated so the gun is free to be immediately drawn if you need it.

In this position, your weak hand is free to open doors, turn on lights, use a flashlight, carry or direct a family member, place a phone call, or simply be kept at the ready as you move, specifically to ensure you maintain control of your firearm and are able to use it effectively should you suddenly be attacked at extreme close range. In this position, you should be able to get your firearm out of the holster and into a shooting position in less than a second, and that tiny bit of a delay is what can easily prevent you from tragically shooting someone you care about or getting your gun taken from you by a close-quarters threat.

In every case of which I'm aware involving an individual mistakenly shooting a family member in his or her home, the gun was

■ **After you are in your barricade position, keeping a pistol in the high compressed ready is almost always the best choice for readiness and low fatigue. Remember: You may be waiting a significant amount of time for the police to respond to your home.**

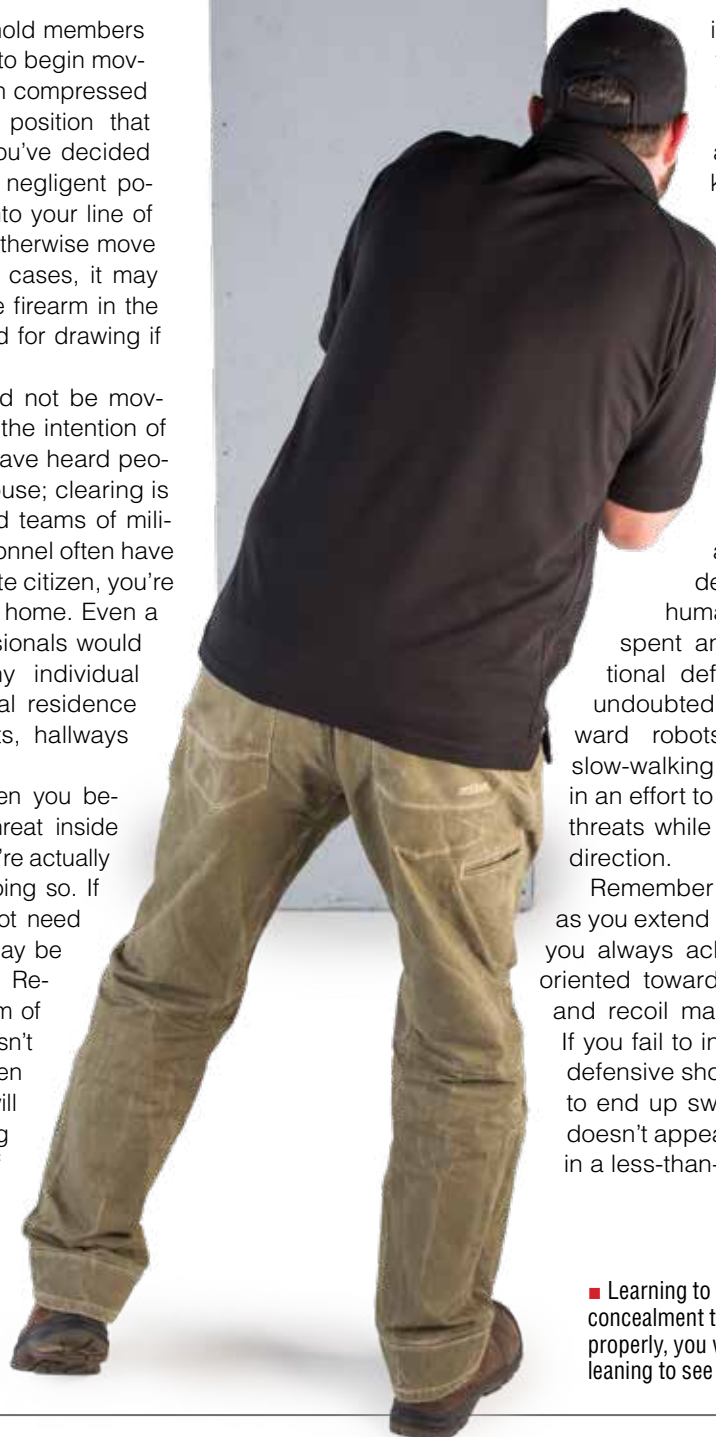
being held out in front of the shooter, in (or close to being in) a shooting position. Studies conducted with law enforcement officers and observations of those who train for armed home defense have shown a high likelihood that even a trained individual will often move his or her trigger finger near or onto the trigger before identifying a threat or making a decision to shoot as his or her anxiety increases. This, specifically, is the source of such tragedy.

This program advocates for strong trigger-finger discipline and a dedication to the high compressed ready position, but that shouldn't be confused with a shooting position. I feel that it is far better to err on the side of caution in any scenario where you're moving toward your family members or even when you're unsure of your family members' locations in the house. In fact, I believe it is unwise to move with your handgun outside of the holster until all household members are accounted for or contact with a visually identified threat is imminent.

After you have your household members behind you, you may choose to begin moving with the firearm in the high compressed ready position. This is the position that should be maintained until you've decided to shoot. Do not fall into the negligent position of extending the gun into your line of sight as you turn corners or otherwise move through your home. In many cases, it may still be preferable to keep the firearm in the holster, with your hand staged for drawing if you need to do so.

Remember that you should not be moving through your house with the intention of finding the threat. You may have heard people talk about "clearing" a house; clearing is something that highly trained teams of military or law enforcement personnel often have trouble doing well. As a private citizen, you're not capable of clearing your home. Even a pair of highly trained professionals would have trouble clearing many individual rooms or spaces in a typical residence because of furniture, closets, hallways and doors.

If you decide to move when you believe that there may be a threat inside your home, be certain that you're actually improving your position by doing so. If you're safe, armed and do not need to secure anyone else, you may be best served by staying put. Remember that "hiding" is a form of barricading; if the threat doesn't know where you are (or even that you're home), he or she will have a hard time positioning himself or herself to hurt you. If you're stationary and watching the door(s) or corner(s) from which a threat can approach, you're generally in a better position than you would be were you to encounter a threat while mov-



ing. If there is a compelling reason to move, you'll want to maximize your chances of seeing the threat before he or she sees you and take any advantage you can from your knowledge of your home.

## MOVEMENT WHILE DRAWING

The concept and fundamentals of lateral movement were covered in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1* and, at this level of training, you should understand the physical actions involved and how to apply those concepts at a higher level. I often tell my students that they need to "move like human beings" on the range. If you've spent any significant time around traditional defensive firearms training, you've undoubtedly seen people moving like awkward robots during drills: side-stepping, slow-walking or oddly contorting their bodies in an effort to keep their shoulders toward their threats while their feet are pointed in another direction.

Remember that the timing of this movement as you extend the gun is intended to ensure that you always achieve a good shooting position: oriented toward your threat to make alignment and recoil management as easy as possible. If you fail to ingrain lateral movement into your defensive shooting response, you're very likely to end up swinging your gun when the threat doesn't appear directly in front of you, resulting in a less-than-optimal shooting position.

- Learning to efficiently use a corner as cover or concealment takes some practice. When done properly, you will be in an unorthodox position, leaning to see around it.



## CORNERS

As you move through your home, you will undoubtedly encounter corners around which there could be a threat. As you approach a corner, you should try to maintain a distance of at least two arms' reach from it, which gives you what is commonly referred to as a "reactionary gap." That gap gives you time to respond appropriately to anything that comes around, or that you see beyond, the corner. Your response will need to include some processing of information: Is the person coming around the corner a threat? If he or she is a threat, is he or she one that you need to shoot? If you are going to shoot, are you going to extend your gun into a preferred shooting position or pull it back into a compressed "retention" position? If you're well-trained and practiced in the contextually appropriate use of a defensive firearm, you're more likely to recognize the correct response than to decide analytically. Either way, you'll still benefit from the time created by the distance to execute your response. If the person you see is not a threat, you will unquestionably benefit from that space, if for no other reason than that your training prepares you to process information before responding. While you may not always be able to maintain two arms' reach from a corner, especially in hallways, it's a good guideline for a minimum distance whenever possible.

If you're moving slowly, especially if you aren't moving toward anyone whose safety you intend to ensure, you should endeavor to expose as little of yourself as possible while looking around a corner. The movement pattern that I teach is to lean out, exposing only as much as needed to be able to see as much as possible, always keeping your lower body behind cover for as long as possible. After you've leaned out as far as you can while maintaining your balance and a generally upright position, you can move your feet so that your outside foot is under your outside eye and then repeat the process. The typical student I have in class will be able to lean out so far that less than 20 percent of his or her weight is on his or her inside foot.

If you're holding your firearm in the ready position, it is vital to avoid the temptation to begin extending the gun or to move your trigger finger toward the trigger as you lean out or move further around the corner. It is irresponsible to move into a shooting position before you have made the decision to shoot; as I covered earlier, that short delay in response is a small price to pay to avoid mistakenly shooting someone you care about or appearing as a threat to a responding police officer or armed family member.

If you're moving quickly in response to a call for help from a family member or a desire to get to him or her in another part of the house to ensure his or her safety, you won't likely take the time to methodically "slice the pie" as described above. In this case, you simply want to avoid rushing around the corner and finding yourself attacked by a threat or smashing into the very family member you were moving toward as he or she made his or her way to you. In this case, you want to slow down or even quickly pause your forward movement in order to peek around the corner before moving into the next hallway or room. Your quick peek should involve two directions, but always check the direction from which you most anticipate a potential threat first.

After you've checked the corner, you can resume moving forward at a speed you deem appropriate until you reach the next corner or door. When you stop to check around a corner, be sure to maintain the reactionary gap described earlier. If you're holding your gun in a two-handed ready position, you should remove your weak hand and partially extend it out in front of you, ready to block or fight, and then replace it on the gun as you resume your movement.

While there are many more sophisticated techniques for checking and rounding corners, especially if you have teammates with whom to do so, they are beyond the scope of this book and the context of most plausible home-defense scenarios.

“  
**AFTER YOU'VE CHECKED THE CORNER, YOU CAN RESUME MOVING FORWARD AT A SPEED YOU DEEM APPROPRIATE UNTIL YOU REACH THE NEXT CORNER OR DOOR. WHEN YOU STOP TO CHECK AROUND A CORNER, BE SURE TO MAINTAIN THE REACTIONARY GAP DESCRIBED EARLIER. IF YOU'RE HOLDING YOUR GUN IN A TWO-HANDED READY POSITION, YOU SHOULD REMOVE YOUR WEAK HAND AND PARTIALLY EXTEND IT OUT IN FRONT OF YOU, READY TO BLOCK OR FIGHT, AND THEN REPLACE IT ON THE GUN AS YOU RESUME YOUR MOVEMENT.**  
”

## SHOOTING AROUND COVER

If you need to shoot around cover, you need to remember two things, and prioritize them as follows:


- 1) Effective shooting — shooting that stops the threat — is the priority.
- 2) You should maximize your use of cover as much as possible.

The best use of cover is irrelevant if you don't stop the threat. If that threat's allowed to move into a position that allows it to hurt someone you care about or take you out of the fight, all is for naught. While I do consider properly shooting around cover an unorthodox shooting position, you must avoid putting yourself so off-balance or getting into such an awkward position that you're unable to efficiently hit your target.

Maximizing your use of cover means that your lower body is completely behind cover and only as much of your upper body as is necessary to engage the threat is exposed. Depending on the specific circumstance, you may not even see the entire threat while you are shooting. If you've seen enough to identify the threat and to land the hit, there's no need to move further out from cover.

Keep in mind that you should not switch the gun from your strong hand to your weak hand if you're shooting around weak-side cover. (Traditionally, the side of your body that you'll be exposing as you look to shoot around cover identifies how it's referred to — hence “strong side” or “weak side.”) When shooting a pistol properly, switching hands gains you nothing in regard to use of cover, and it reduces your ability to control deviation. You might benefit slightly by using whichever eye is to the outside of the cover if you need your sights to take a shot, but the amount would likely be irrelevant in a dynamic situation. Be careful about chasing a degree or two of angle on the range with static targets, no urgency and complete control over your environment.

If you're in a static barricaded position and you have cover (other than a closed door) between you and the threat, you should position yourself with your upper body leaning out beyond your lower body if you can. Balancing your control and fatigue against the potentially small advantage of having some of your body remain behind cover if you have to shoot is something that you will have to figure out in the moment. This will likely be something that you adjust mid-incident based on time or stimuli that might indicate the position or approach of a potential threat.

A man wearing a black baseball cap and a black t-shirt is shown from the chest up, positioned behind a white wall. He is holding a handgun with both hands, aiming it around the edge of the wall. His body is mostly behind the wall, with only his head, shoulders, and arms visible. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

■ By exposing as little of your body as possible when shooting around cover, you minimize your chances of being seen or injured.



CHAPTER TEN

# **CLEAR THAT GUN: THE NON-DIAGNOSTIC LINEAR MALFUNCTION RESPONSE**





**B**y now, it should be clearly established that you want to rely as little as possible on visual reference to run your gun. While the majority of the defensive shooting world has accepted this fact under most conditions, the area of malfunction response lags behind in most defensive training programs. I believe that there are a couple of reasons for this. As usual, simple complacency and inertia are the primary factors in the lack of evolution in the way clearing malfunctions is taught. “We’ve always done it this way” or “So-and-so taught me to do it this way” are the banes of progress and evolution. Also as usual, logic is the best way to fight against such factors. If you don’t need to look at your gun to load it, reload it, draw it from the holster or even hit your target under the majority of defensive shooting situations, why should you need to look at your gun to clear a malfunction? If you don’t need to look, why would you want to? Do the perceived benefits of looking at your gun to clear a malfunction during a fight come at too great a cost or create potential risks that wouldn’t exist otherwise? Are the perceived benefits of looking at your gun while clearing a malfunction even real?

If you’ve gotten this far into this book and understood the Intuitive Defensive Shooting fundamentals that underlie the program, you should know that the answers lead to a process for clearing malfunctions that does not rely on visual reference.

## **NON-DIAGNOSTIC LINEAR MALFUNCTION RESPONSE (NDLMR)**

This process relies on establishing consistent stimulus-response patterns for clearing all plausible malfunctions you could conceivably encounter and fix during a dynamic critical incident. This is a relatively narrow set of malfunctions that can be dealt with through a simple series of responses.

Remember that these principles aren’t based solely on theory. Observing thousands of students at all levels of skill respond to and clear malfunctions of all conceivable types under a wide variety of conditions established a great deal of empirical evidence that this process not only works but is the most efficient process of which I am aware.

Many instructors have been using the NDLMR since the mid-2000s to help students train to keep their firearms in the fight as efficiently as possible, and we’ve run countless people through the process blindfolded with guns set up to malfunction in a variety of ways to prove its efficacy. You can

probably find some videos of these blindfolded drills online, but don’t try them yourself without proper certified supervision. Let’s break down two key principles of the NDLMR:

### **Non-Diagnostic:**

We don’t need to apply any resources to what the problem actually is; what’s actually happening with the gun will dictate our response. You can think of it as treating the symptom rather than the cause, and we do this for efficiency’s sake. If you’re in the middle of a busy workday and you feel a headache coming on, you’re going to take some aspirin — not leave work, check into a hospital and undergo a battery of tests and scans. That process would not only be costly and time-consuming, it would mean that you wouldn’t get your work done that day.

If your job is surviving a lethal encounter, you can’t afford to waste time or fail. If interrupted, you need to get back to work as quickly as possible, and pushing through the immediate issue with as little time and effort as possible is vital.

### **Linear:**

The series of steps in this process are to be followed in order, from the recognition of the first stimulus until your gun is running properly again or you reach a dead-end and realize that your gun is out of the fight. Skipping around or repeating steps that aren’t working will almost always create delays in getting back into the fight. On the shooting range, it may be very tempting to skip or repeat steps, especially if your training discipline has slipped and you’ve looked at the gun. If you think you’ve figured out (“diagnosed”) the exact problem but deviate from the NDLMR process, you may solve the problem, but you will have undermined the training model that is intended to create efficient automated responses in the context of a fight. Remember: The range is a racetrack and, as such, you can do things there that may not be the best choice during a fight.

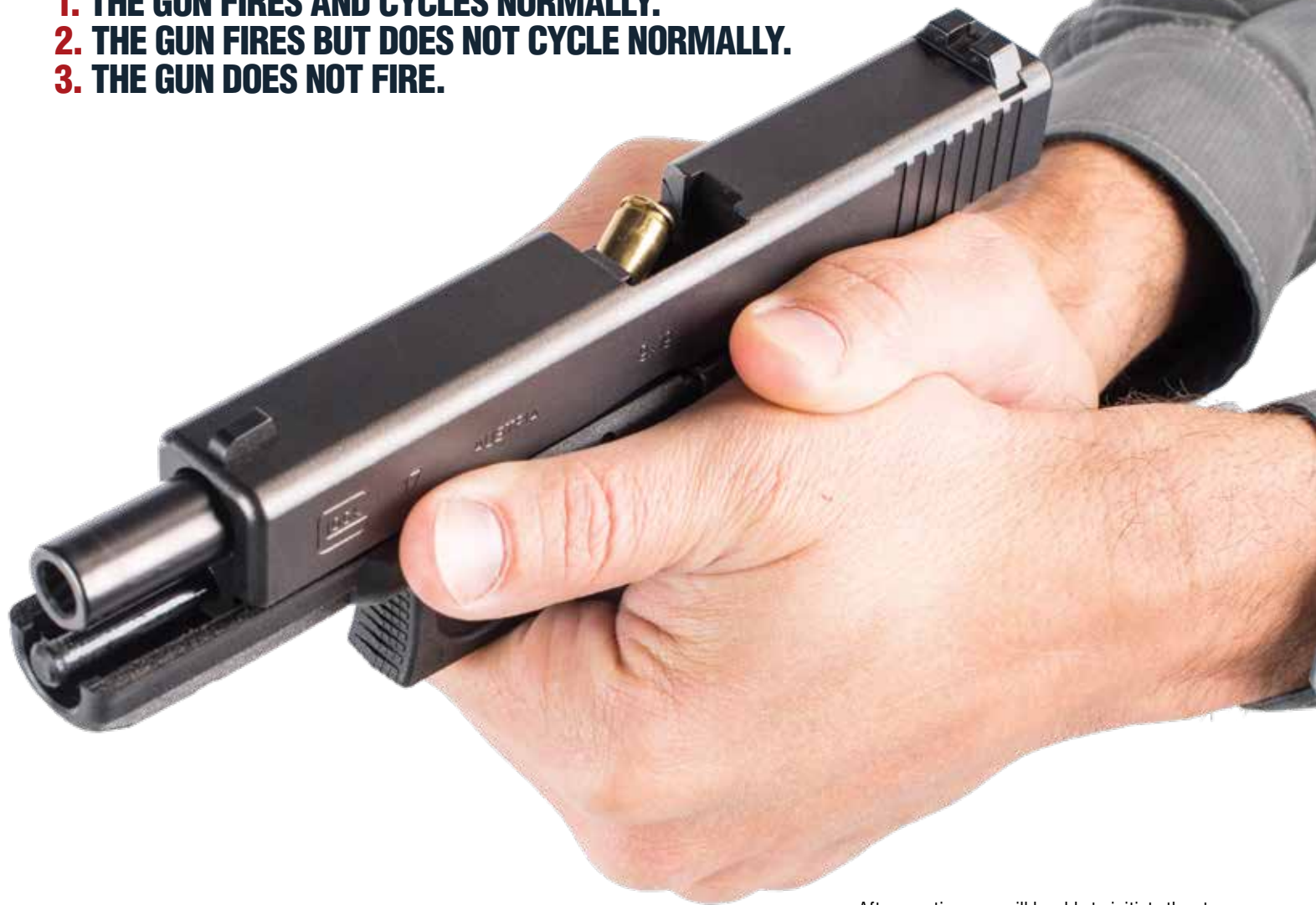
## **INPUT VS. OUTPUT**

When you pull the trigger on your gun, one of three things happens:

1. The gun fires and cycles normally.
2. The gun fires but does not cycle normally.
3. The gun does not fire.

## WHEN YOU PULL THE TRIGGER ON YOUR GUN, ONE OF THREE THINGS HAPPENS:

1. THE GUN FIRES AND CYCLES NORMALLY.
2. THE GUN FIRES BUT DOES NOT CYCLE NORMALLY.
3. THE GUN DOES NOT FIRE.



■ After practice, you will be able to initiate the steps of the NDLMR in an automated way when your gun doesn't function properly. You won't need to look at your gun or think about what went wrong ... you'll just work on getting it running again.



## IF YOU EXPERIENCE A MALFUNCTION, YOU CAN EXECUTE ONE OR MORE OF THE THREE STEPS OF THE NDLMR IN RESPONSE: THE TAP & RACK, THE RELOAD OR THE COMPLEX RELOAD.

### EXECUTE YOUR RESPONSE

If you experience a malfunction, you can execute one or more of the three steps of the NDLMR in response:

- **The Tap & Rack**
- **The Reload**
- **The Complex Reload**

### THE TAP & RACK

The most common malfunction fix for a modern firearm in good condition — and what your initial response to one will usually be — is known as the “Tap & Rack.” Tap & Rack is the first step in the Non-Diagnostic Linear Malfunction Response process.

“Tap” refers to smacking the bottom of the magazine in an attempt to ensure that it is properly seated. “Rack” means to grasp the rear of the slide (behind the ejection port) between the palm and the fingertips of the weak hand and move it rapidly to the rear, manually cycling the pistol. These actions will almost always solve or identify the problem. Here are some examples of how:

- Clearing a bad round from the chamber and getting a new round into it.
- Seating the magazine and chambering a round.
- Chambering a round in a gun that has an empty chamber.
- Cocking the hammer on a single-action gun and chambering a round.
- Reminding you to take the safety off on a single-action gun with a frame-mounted safety that blocks the movement of the slide when engaged.
- Identifying that a slide-mounted safety was mistakenly left in the “on” position while you were trying to shoot.
- Identifying that you did not have a magazine in the gun.

- Clearing a failure to eject.
- Clearing a failure to feed.

If you Tap & Rack successfully and the gun still does not fire when you pull the trigger, you should proceed to the second step of the NDLMR: the Reload.

### THE RELOAD

In the second case, your standard response is to perform the Reload, because that’s the response you’ve tied to the stimulus of slide lock (which is not a malfunction but rather a sign that you need to do something other than keep shooting until it’s time to stop shooting). When a failure to cycle is actually a malfunction, responding with the typical Emergency Reload process will often solve the problem. For this reason, the NDLMR dictates the Reload as the standard response to any perception of a failure of your gun to properly cycle through ejection and the chambering of a new round after firing.

It should be noted that some schools in the past did teach that slide-lock on an empty magazine was a malfunction. While this is nonsensical and was based on the mistaken belief that counting your rounds during a fight was both possible and a good idea, it does speak to the fact that the process of the Emergency Reload is primarily about getting your gun back into a fight as efficiently as possible, the same thing you’re trying to do when responding to a true malfunction.

If you cannot perform the Emergency Reload in the normal way, usually because your magazine does not drop free or you cannot seat a new magazine, you will proceed to the third step of the NDLMR: the Complex Reload.





## ■ TAP & RACK

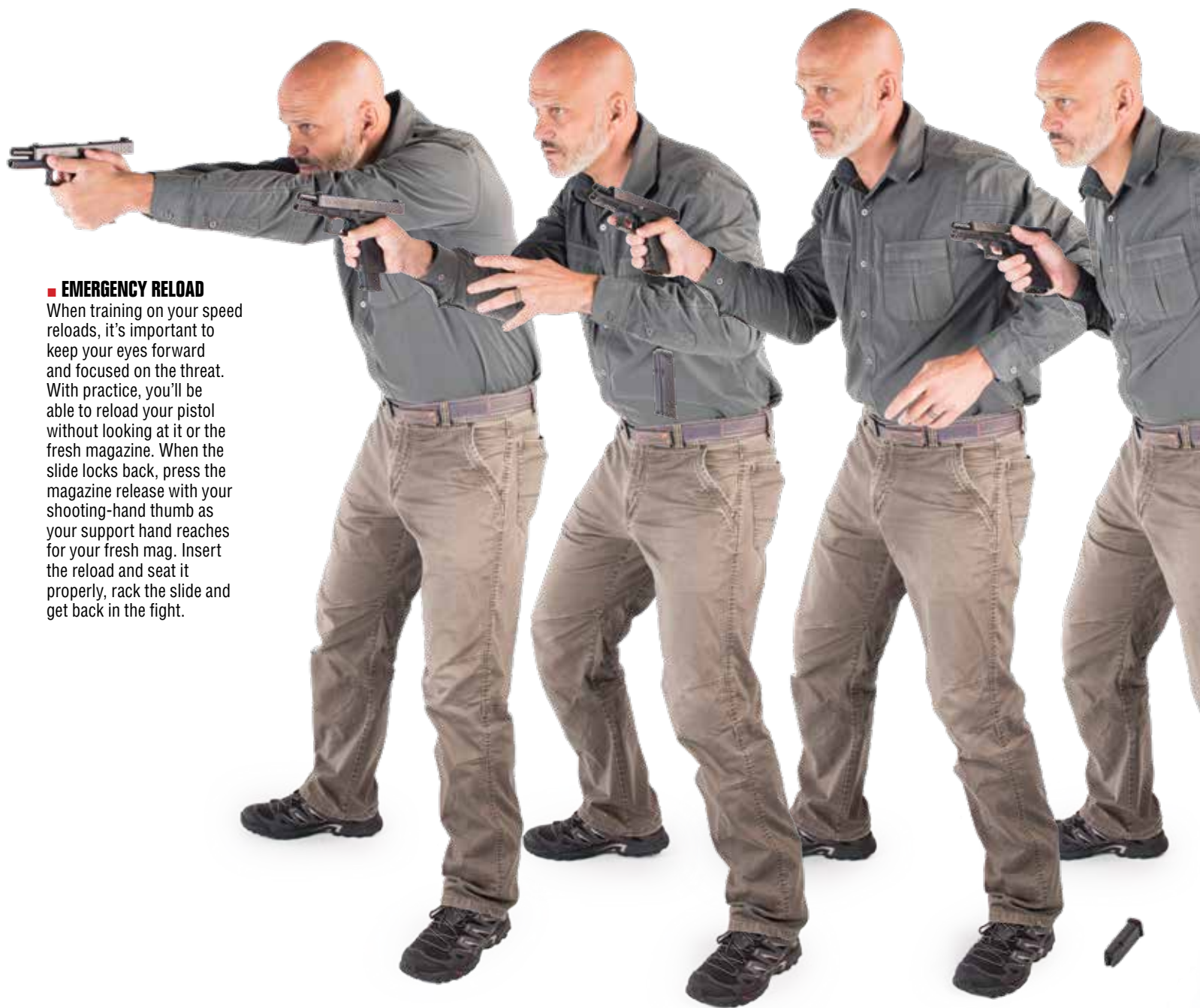
The process of tapping the magazine and racking the slide will solve the vast majority of real-world problems with a semi-automatic pistol. In most

cases where it doesn't solve the problem, it will help you identify the proper solution, such as when you feel that the magazine well is empty when tapping or that the slide is locked open when racking. It should be practiced consistently, whenever you pull the trigger intending to shoot but the gun does not fire.

Rack the slide with your hand over the top of it but behind the ejection port, release the slide and let it move forward freely, and then fire if you still need to. If you press the trigger and only hear a "click," firmly slap your magazine baseplate with the swell of your palm, rack the slide with your hand over the top of it but behind the ejection port, release the slide and let it move forward freely, and then fire if you still need to.

### ■ EMERGENCY RELOAD

When training on your speed reloads, it's important to keep your eyes forward and focused on the threat. With practice, you'll be able to reload your pistol without looking at it or the fresh magazine. When the slide locks back, press the magazine release with your shooting-hand thumb as your support hand reaches for your fresh mag. Insert the reload and seat it properly, rack the slide and get back in the fight.











## THE COMPLEX RELOAD

As the name implies, the Complex Reload requires you to perform more steps than with the Reload. The stimulus to perform this step is that the typical Reload can't be done as noted above because of magazine issues or because the gun doesn't fire after you believe you have completed the Reload. The Complex Reload is composed of the following steps:

- Remove the old magazine. You may need to lock the slide open first to relieve pressure on the magazine exerted by jammed rounds.
- Clear the chamber by manually cycling the gun, completely and forcefully racking it two or three times.
- Perform the typical Emergency Reload.



The Complex Reload should solve any problem that *can* be solved during a fight, but it takes much more time and effort than the first two parts of the NDLMR, which is why you shouldn't skip to it unless your attempt at the typical Reload was unsuccessful. In practice, this step is rarely needed.

#### ■ **COMPLEX RELOAD**

You should only move to the third step in the NDLMR, the Complex Reload, if your attempt at the typical Reload was unsuccessful. Most often you will need to do this when a magazine will not drop free or cannot be inserted properly.





CHAPTER ELEVEN

# THE SKILL-DEVELOPMENT CYCLE





**T**he Skill-Development Cycle (SDC) provides an easy way to understand the complete process of training and practice. Everyone's training resources are limited. I've worked with individuals who aren't allowed to own more than a certain number of rounds with which to train at any one given time in their jurisdictions. I've worked with military personnel deployed overseas in low-profile assignments who operate in environments where they cannot live-fire train at all for months at a time. I've worked with guys with big budgets, with the highest levels of need, at the pointiest, sharpest tip of the spear when it comes to American combat forces — and even they have some limitations on how much or how well they can train. Whether it's hours in a day, rounds in a box, access to a range or even just motivation to train, everyone's training resources are limited. So you need to make the most of your training resources and have a concrete, organized way to track your progress.

The SDC helps you to use your resources as efficiently as possible and to focus on making sure you're getting the most out of any given training moment or opportunity that you can. Too often, a person will go out to the range with a gun and ammo but without an agenda or goal and with no real frame of reference for what he or she should be doing. The SDC aims to solve this and is comprised of three parts: Learning, Developing and Evaluating.

## LEARNING A NEW SKILL

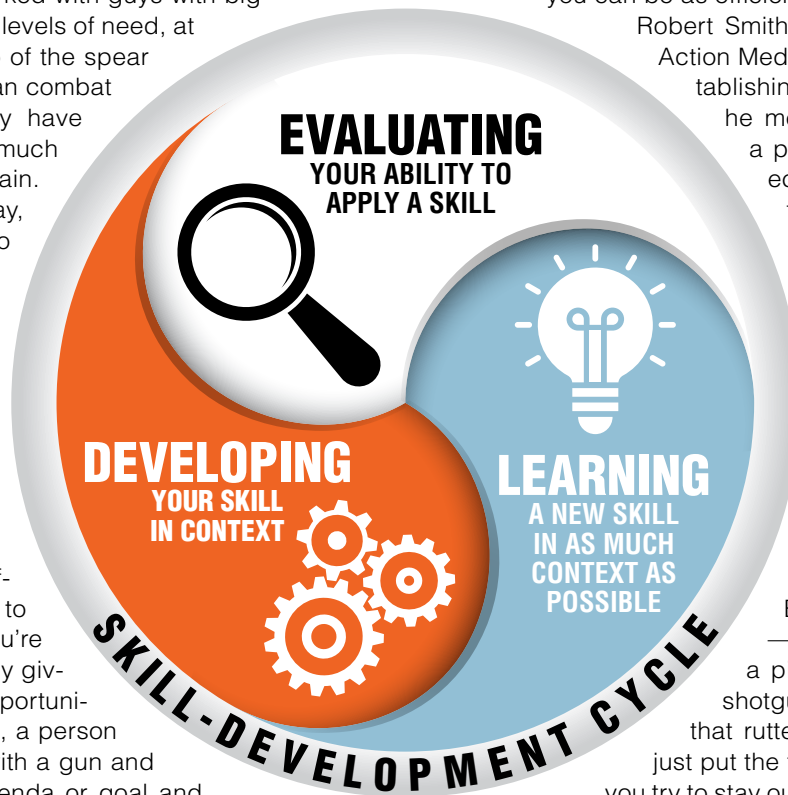
You need to make sure you're doing something right, but before that, you need to figure out what "right" is. Some people will tell you "what's right" is a matter of opinion, while

others will tell you that their way is "a" way, though not necessarily "the" way. Some people will tell you that you want to collect "tools for your toolbox" in regard to your techniques and your skillsets. In my opinion, there absolutely should be a way in which you choose to train when it comes to your defensive skills. This is especially true when it comes to counter-ambush skillsets, which you'll want to be able to execute in automated ways — reactions to learned stimuli — so that you can be as efficient as possible.

Robert Smith, MD, founder of the Direct Action Medical Network, talks about establishing a "rut in the road." What he means by this is establishing a pathway in your brain for executing complex motor skills that are stimulated by predictable things and that will result in efficient execution of a skill and completion of whatever goal it is you're looking to achieve. I love the "rut in the road" analogy. If you've ever driven down a rutted dirt road, you know that if you go slowly, you can keep your tires out of the ruts and negotiate the road. But if you're trying to go fast — if you're getting chased by a pickup truck full of guys with shotguns and you're driving down that rutted road — you may as well just put the tires in the ruts and floor it. If

you try to stay out of the ruts, you'll eventually fall into them, strip a tire off a rim, hit a tree or experience some other unpleasant reality. So when the stakes are high enough, just get in a rut and go. That's the way the brain works sometimes.

There are structures inside the brain called neurons, and each neuron has a lot of different parts, one of which is the axon. The axon is the part of the neuron that sends messages to the next neuron. It says, "Hey! We're reloading now.





We're drawing the gun from the holster. We're managing recoil. We're doing what we do." The more you use those neurons, the more you send messages down the axons and the more of a sheath that develops around them. This sheath is composed of a fatty substance called myelin. The more repetitions you put in using that neuron to establish this pathway in your brain, the faster that message can be transferred because of that myelin sheath. Now I don't want to get too far into the biology and physiology of it, but it's a fact. We know this happens, and it's what some people call "muscle memory" — doing something much easier after a bunch of repetition. This is the biology and physiology of that concept: The greater amount of myelin on that neuron, the faster a message can be transferred.

If you get a whole string of these neurons together that are all acting faster, that becomes a path of least resistance. So now, with that path of least resistance through the brain, it's far more likely that a message is going to flow under stress through that particular path, which will be faster than any other avenue.

So this is good, but if you try to learn seven different ways to reload the gun and seven different ready positions for the gun, and if you have to learn to present the gun to the shooting position from all these different places, all of a sudden, you don't get this good solid buildup of myelination down the path you want to follow. You don't get a good, deep rut in the road; you get a whole bunch of partial ruts. You get a whole bunch of, "Well, it could be either way" if you go down this path. Is it going to be this way, or is it going to be that? Or maybe you get halfway through reload option No. 1 and then you switch over to reload option No. 2. Maybe those two techniques don't go together and, all of a sudden, you're way behind the curve. Under stress, you won't have a default reaction and response pattern that makes sense. You're stuck with natural reactions, but you should absolutely pick and choose the best possible learned responses.

Now, there's an asterisk. I always say, "When you take a class from me, I will be passionate about teaching you THE way that I think is best." This is life-or-death information and, as such, I'm not going to burden your brain with 15 different options. I'm not going to acknowledge that there are lesser options that you might want to learn to be a "better-versed" firearms handler. I don't believe in that; I don't think it's the

right way to allocate your resources. I think you should learn the way that is best, and, since you're paying me, a professional instructor, to tell you what I think is best, I'm going to tell you. I could be wrong. I could change my mind tomorrow (and I have changed my mind plenty of times in the past). Sometimes I change my mind in class; a student will say, "Well, what about this?" and I'll say, "Well, I hadn't considered that. For you, you should do this."

Maybe it's just been an evolution. Maybe another instructor has come up to me after class and said, "Hey, I didn't want to interrupt, but maybe you should consider this," and it turns out to be something I've never heard before. So when I say, "There's not a bunch of ways, there's one way," it's not necessarily that one way forever. But give me 15 ways to look at something and I'm going to pick the one I want to learn, and that's the one I'm going to teach.

## CONTEXT

You can't learn how to shoot a gun in an actual fight; that's just not going to be practical. I'm not going to go out in the street and pick a fight with somebody, wait for him to pull a knife and then try to figure out how to shoot my gun. Without question and in a practical sense, you're going to have to learn how to shoot your gun in a defensive and intuitive way if you're going to be able to do what's necessary to save yourself or another from deadly violence.

You learn a skill by slowing down for safety and complexity issues. The more complex a skill is, the more you will slow it down from reality. Similarly, the greater the safety concerns, the more you will slow down and step out of context. This system allows you to learn a skill in as much context as possible while still slowing down for safety and complexity as necessary.

So what does this look like in practice? Well, in Combat Focus Shooting, we start new shooters from the ready position. Never shot a gun before? Cool, there's a gun. Pick it up, go to the ready position. You don't need to know how to load it, you don't need to know the terminology, you don't need to know the nomenclature, you don't need to know what brand of gun it is. Just pick it up and get a good grip. We will coach you through the rest.

Stand at a natural, neutral position, drive the gun out, press the trigger and the bullet will show up where it's supposed to;





that's what we're looking to teach. We want to get students shooting at full extension and from kinesthetic alignment as quickly as possible, but we slow it down for the sake of safety and complexity. We have students fire one shot at the high-center chest of their targets, even though, in normal defensive training at 10 to 20 feet (where we start people out), we would want them to perform multiple-shot strings of fire. Because of safety and complexity, we start a new shooter out with a single shot and then build him or her up (albeit pretty quickly) from there.

## DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS IN CONTEXT

The second phase of the Skill-Development Cycle is to develop the skill — what most people refer to as “practice.” As mentioned above, you should always do your best to develop a skill in the expected context of use. What that means is you're not really practicing your defensive shooting into the high-center chest at 10 feet if you're shooting single shots, because you're probably not planning on shooting

■ “Training” can mean many things. After you have learned to perform a skill, you will need to develop and maintain that skill through repeated practice sessions. You should practice your skills in the way that you intend to apply them.

single shots under that circumstance. You need to be managing recoil. You need to be firing multiple-shot strings of fire. You need to make sure those strings aren't choreographed to such an extent that you're always shooting twice or always shooting three times. You need to make sure that you're driving the gun out and visualizing a threat. You're firing two, three, maybe four or five rounds. You're stopping your string of fire and you're pulling the gun back in. You're assessing the environment to make sure you're safe. All of these things

replicate and reinforce the kinds of actions you might have to take in an actual fight.

That said, you can sometimes learn a skill through intentionally stepping out of context. When you're truly developing your skill, this is the practice moment. You want to make sure that you're doing it in a way that is congruent with the intended use of the skill (i.e. “in context”). For example, in the “Balance of Speed & Precision Drill,” we don't tell someone, “OK. You're going to fire a single shot into the ‘3.’ Stand by for the whistle.” We don't say, “Fire two shots into the chest on



the buzzer.” In a counter-ambush training model, you have to acknowledge that processing information prior to the execution of the complex motor skill is imperative, because a counter-ambush is just that.

You’re thinking about what kind of food to order or you’re standing on the corner talking to your friend, and then, “Bang!” *Whoa! What’s going on?* Your brain is processing information that tells you that you need your gun.

If that is the most-likely counter-ambush scenario, then you don’t want to practice for nothing but, “Hey, what’s that guy with the AK-47 doing? I think I may need to shoot him in a second. Let me watch and wait.” That’s anticipating an event, not a counter-ambush scenario. In the counter-ambush model, you have to process the information at the moment you need to access the skill.

So you want to include that ethos whenever you’re training. You do the “Balance of Speed & Precision Drill” standing in front of a target, and there are a couple of different com-

■ After practice, you will be ready to take part in dynamic drills that simulate real-world application of your skills while on the range. High-level drills used to evaluate your ability to apply your skills shouldn’t be attempted before you are comfortable performing those skills in standard drills that have fewer variables and less chaos.

mands you might get. There are a couple of different types of targets you might have to shoot and, most importantly, you’ll have to process all of that information and then execute the appropriate complex motor skill.

## EVALUATING YOUR ABILITY TO APPLY A SKILL

In a lot of ways, I don’t care about your ability to perform a skill. If you’re at the point where you’ve developed and practiced a skill, your ability to quickly and efficiently reload your gun is something I’m willing to take for granted. If you’ve actually been training, what’s the point of me saying, “Put one round in your gun with an empty magazine, fire a shot, do a reload and shoot again”? That skill, in isolation, is relatively easy to learn, relatively easy to get good at and kind of irrelevant to test. Let’s face it: You’re never going to be in a fight where you’re going to load one round into your gun, put an empty magazine in, fire at an attacker, then perform a quick reload and shoot again. So I don’t care if it’s reloads, malfunctions or “on the buzzer” to see how fast you can get your

gun out the holster and send a shot. Those kinds of scenarios certainly aren't counter-ambush; your ability to perform skills like that in that context are kind of irrelevant. I want to know how well you can apply all of your skills in the situation for which they're meant. To achieve that, I want to create some kind of simulation for you.

On a square range, you can use the "Figure 8 Drill" to simulate a 360-degree environment with a lot of differing variables, like where your attacker could be, what size your available target is and at what distance a specific target is within plausible range. When you're doing an honest "Figure 8 Drill," there's a lot of information that has to get processed. You should also attempt to introduce some anxiety into the drill. (In my classes, people are watching, it's getting close to the end of the class and I want to see if you can apply the skill.) If you're trying to process all this information and you drive your gun out, and you intend to fire three or four shots, you should know that some of this will inevitably get choreographed. You might even say, "Next target I'm going to fire four shots," and when the next target comes up and you feel "Bang! Bang! SLIDE LOCK," it can be very telling.

Do you recognize slide lock and instantly begin executing a slide-lock emergency reload? Or do you still try to pull the trigger because you wanted to fire four shots? If you fail to recognize slide lock and immediately react to it, you've failed to apply the skill of the critical incident reload when you actually needed it during the simulation.

Now, in such a situation, you may eventually get that gun reloaded. Obviously, almost anyone can get the gun reloaded after pulling the trigger a couple of times and realizing it's out of rounds. You get the gun reloaded. That's great; you performed the skill of the reload, but you failed to apply it at what should have been your learned stimulus — slide lock — in that simulation. That's a failure.



■ There are a variety of training tools available to enhance your skill development and evaluation during simulations and scenarios. They should only be used with all proper safety equipment and under the supervision of certified instructors.

We've distinguished between simulation and scenario: Scenario is when you have role players. Scenario is when you have a situation in which you have to process a lot of interactive information and then correctly execute multiple skillsets that may not even include shooting: maybe verbalization, maybe movement to cover and maybe escape. It could

be as simple as awareness: "Oh, that guy who's approaching me may be a threat. Let me orient toward him while shifting my body to make sure nobody is sneaking up behind me."

So scenarios are complex and they're hard to run safely. You need role players, Simunition, UTM or other similar "man-marking" guns, a controlled environment ... the list goes on and on. Simulations are easier. With the "Figure 8 Drill," you can run a live-fire simulation with just paper targets and a good dirt berm by setting it up and running it properly and safely.





All in all, the trick is to evaluate the application of skills, not the isolated performance of individual skills. If you're standing on the line, isolating presentation and trying to see how fast you can go, you're missing the point. That is a skill in isolation. That's

great for competition, that's great for bragging rights, that's great for seeing who's going to buy the beverages after your time at the range with your buddies, but it's not testing your ability to react and respond in a real fight.

How familiar does this sound? You have a friend with a timer, you've got your gun in a new holster and you're going to test how fast you are from your new rig. You're ready and you get set. "Buzz!"

"Sorry, I wasn't ready. Can you do it again?" After a few more hiccups, you finally go.

"What was the time?"

"1.2."

"Okay, let me try again."

"Bang!"

"0.9."

"Bang!"

"1.0."

Round that off to 1.05.

You think about it: The fastest man in the world can move 7 feet in 1.05 seconds from standing still. Bearing that in mind, you declare yourself safe from all persons that are more than 10 feet away from you, as long as you have your gun in your new holster.

That kind of math used to make sense to me — skills in isolation. The reality is, if some guy pulls out a knife and says, "I'm going to stab you" and you're forced to react to that, that 1.05 second time trial is irrelevant. It's the processing of the information, the recognition of what you actually need to do — like defeating your concealment garment — that applies in a simulation or scenario that doesn't apply when you measure skills in isolation.

So what do you do next? In short, it's a Skill-Development Cycle. If you evaluate your ability to apply

your skill and you believe that you're good to go — if you're happy with your level of competency (which is a subjective thing) — then move on. Everybody comes to the table with different levels of athleticism, intellect, coordination, interest, need, experience and familiarity with their firearms. Everyone comes to the table with different starting points, so everybody's answer to, "Am I happy with how I can apply this skill?" is going to be different. If you find yourself good to go, the cycle returns to Step 1: learning the new skill or maybe learning a new context. In

other words, you learned Intuitive Defensive Shooting with two hands, so now you're going to learn Intuitive Defensive Shooting with one hand. Learn a new skill or learn a new context for that skill.

What if you find yourself lacking? What if you aren't happy with your performance? Well, then you're going back to Step 2. You're not going to learn anything new. You're going to practice your skill and context, do a short loop, build your skill up a

little higher, run another simulation or scenario, and then test your ability to apply the skill until you find yourself satisfied. After you're satisfied, then you take the big loop all the way back to learning a new skill again.

The Skill-Development Cycle gives you a way to generally evaluate an individual application of a skill, but you should always ask yourself, "What am I doing right now? Did I come to the range today to learn how to shoot a gun or to develop my skill in shooting a gun I already own? Am I ready to evaluate my ability to use that gun in some kind of a simulation that my training partners are going to set up for me?"

Know what you're doing at any given time, make sure it fits into one of those pieces of the puzzle and be certain that the timing of that piece makes sense. Don't run out and try to evaluate your ability to apply a skill when you haven't developed it well or when you're just guessing how to do it. That's a very real danger too.



**“  
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AND BE CERTAIN THAT THE  
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MAKES SENSE.  
”**



A black plastic storage bin with a textured lid and a latch. On top of the bin is a blue spray bottle with a red nozzle and a silver magazine. The bin has a logo that says 'BREAKTHROUGH CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES'.

CHAPTER TWELVE

# **EMERGENCY MEDICAL EQUIPMENT FOR THE RANGE**





Anytime you participate in live-fire training, you are accepting the risk of serious injury or even death. That risk extends not just to you but to anyone within range of the rounds you're loading into your gun. Atop that, unless you're alone, you also expose yourself to the risk that someone else may injure or kill you.

If you're instructing or running drills, your responsibility extends beyond your own actions to include those under your supervision. This is why I stress in all of my Instructor Development Courses that safety is the first priority of the instructor above all else. I also stress that the instructor is ultimately responsible for whatever happens on his or her range, including actions any students take outside of directions, expectations or the stated safety rules or procedures. An instructor needs to anticipate those actions and head them off.

I also require all certified instructors to keep gunshot-wound-specific emergency medical equipment on the range, know how to use it and show it to everyone participating in any session.

When you're practicing on your own, you take on the role of instructor and student. I strongly suggest you have at your disposal the same equipment and knowledge anytime you are using firearms, be you alone or in a group. Training, hunting, plinking, competing and even just trying out a friend's gun all involve danger. I suggest you have your own equipment, even if the range you are using stages its own medical kit (as it should).

## MUST-HAVE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

The four things that you should have, in order of importance, are listed in the following paragraphs. Regardless of what equipment you choose, be sure that you under-



stand how to use it to provide aid to yourself or others and that you have practiced with the exact brand and type you own.

It is also highly recommended that, if you are taking your personal safety seriously enough to be training in this program for the defensive use of a firearm, you also take an emergency trauma medicine class.

## PRESSURE DRESSING

A pressure dressing is a two-part piece of medical gear designed to establish and maintain direct pressure over a wound. Typically, a pad comprised of layers of gauze is attached to about an arm's length of wrapping material. The wrap usually contains some elastic to assist in maintaining pressure when properly applied.

## TOURNIQUET

A tourniquet is a device that stops arterial blood flow to a limb. Many people think that tourniquets can be easily improvised with belts, shoelaces or other items. While that is technically possible, you should purchase a purpose-built unit and learn how to use it. Obviously, for the purpose of emergency treatment when you're training alone, you should select a tourniquet that you can efficiently apply to yourself — with one hand, if necessary.



■ Over the last few years, more and more defensive gun owners are realizing that having emergency medical equipment and the knowledge of how to use it is at least as important as developing their shooting skills if they are truly interested in being as prepared as possible to take care of themselves and others. Training information on the gear and its use is available online from the USCCA and Personal Defense Network.

## PACKING GAUZE, PREFERABLY WITH HEMOSTATIC AGENT

“Packing” gauze is a length of gauze separate from your pressure dressing that can be used to pack a wound to promote clotting or as additional absorbent material for direct-pressure applications. Several varieties of gauze are available with chemical agents, referred to as “hemostatic,” that speed the clotting action of blood. Some people choose to have both standard gauze and hemostatic-impregnated gauze, as the former has a wider variety of uses and is much less expensive.

## CHEST SEALS

Chest seals are occlusive adhesive dressings that block the flow of air through chest wounds that have penetrated the lung(s). Sealing the hole on the torso is intended to return the airflow through the lungs to normal so that blood can be oxygenated properly. Chest seals usually come packaged

in pairs, enabling an individual to seal entry and exit wounds from a gunshot.

## MED-KIT STORAGE

I recommend that you keep your emergency medical equipment on the range separate from other gear, even other non-emergency medical equipment. You don’t want to be digging through a backpack full of Band-Aids, burn gel and CPR masks while you’re losing blood from an arterial wound and need a tourniquet.





CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# INTUITIVE DEFENSIVE SHOOTING DRILLS







■ You can't focus on multiple threats at the same time. You must engage targets individually, and you must always ensure that you need to shoot immediately before doing so. You cannot responsibly train to shoot targets sequentially without individual assessment of the need to shoot.

**M**ultiple-target engagement is at the forefront of many concealed carriers' minds and, in an effort to feel as prepared as possible for such situations, countless multiple-threat drills flood the defensive shooting market. Unfortunately, I think that many of them miss some important realities of human response to threats and the dynamic nature of lethal encounters. In missing these fundamental components of the situations for which you intend to prepare, you can end up not truly preparing yourself at all. Real multiple-threat situations aren't resolved in the same way that a plate rack is run.

### **REALISTIC TRAINING FOR MULTIPLE-TARGET ENGAGEMENT**

When you watch the world's best shooters take down plate racks or shoot speed steel stages in competition, there's no doubt that it's a thing of beauty. Like a World Superbike racer taking a Ducati through a chicane or Tina Maze heading down a mountain toward an Olympic medal, an athlete excelling in his or her sport is awe-inspiring. As you often see, however, trying to emulate the techniques used in that environment can leave you ill-prepared for activities in the less-choreographed world in which you have to live and operate.

The human brain and body evolved with a special skill for

picking up and focusing on threats. This focus is physical (orienting, looking, bringing your hands to a place to intercept attacks, etc.) and psychological (ignoring distractions and "forgetting" about things that just a second before might have been very important). If you can imagine a time when you were especially frightened or startled, you might recall that all of your attention instantly went to that thing that caused the fear. Whether the situation was an attack, an automobile accident or perhaps some type of gear issue while climbing or diving, that focus was probably quite intense. The more fear, the higher the focus.

Because of this focus, it is highly unlikely that you will be able to choreograph any response to multiple threats during a defensive shooting situation. For this reason, training to deal with one threat and then immediately assessing the environment — combined with lateral movement from a defensive position — and continuing until no threats remain is what I recommend.

On a standard range, with multiple targets in front of you, this can look quite strange and seem very slow, but it's a much more realistic approach to training yourself to prepare for finding, recognizing and dealing with a second threat. Sure, you can clear that plate rack far faster by never reassessing, but you know you're supposed to shoot all of those



■ Through repeated practice of moving while you draw your firearm, your movement pattern will become automated. Only through repetition over extended time can you hope to ingrain responses and techniques to the point where you can count on them in an emergency.



## “ EMBRACE YOUR ABILITY TO FOCUS INTENTLY ON THREATS THAT YOUR EARLY WARNING SYSTEM PICKS UP. ”

plates. The hand-eye coordination of the average shooter is so advanced as to make that shift of eyes and movement of hands incredibly easy when he or she knows what's coming. A lot of people miss this incredibly important point when they set out to prepare themselves as best they can for a defensive shooting. Unfortunately, doing so means that you're developing a reliance on a skillset that you may not be able to draw upon under critical-incident stress. If you miss this point, you might have a very overrated sense of your ability to deal with multiple threats. Training should be about finding your limits and extending them, not developing false confidence. Remember, when it comes to counter-ambush training, you should be preparing for the worst-case scenarios.

While we chuckle at the idea that entire civilizations of people believed three women clipping strings controlled every individual's fate, few would dispute the brilliance and value of a man like Plato. Similarly, in 2010, we can see the irrelevance of a drill like “El Presidente” in preparing for a real-world, multiple-threat ambush, but I would never question the value of the men who defined and recommended the drill given the information that they had.

It should be noted that, after becoming aware of my position on this topic, I was contacted by noted authority Dave Spaulding and advised that he had a conversation with none other than Jeff Cooper, the acknowledged developer of the drill, who lamented the fact that it had become a standard for multiple-target engagement. I never had the privilege of discussing “El Presidente” with Cooper, but I can't imagine a logical explanation that would justify it as a simulation of a real counter-ambush shooting situation with multiple threats.

There is a basic drill described toward the end of this book

that will help you realistically train for addressing multiple threats when you don't have a stage briefing, static targets or high-level anticipation of what you will need to do while under attack.

Embrace your ability to focus intently on threats that your early warning system picks up. It may have already saved your life countless times, and it could be the edge that helps you survive your next fight. You must also accept the limita-

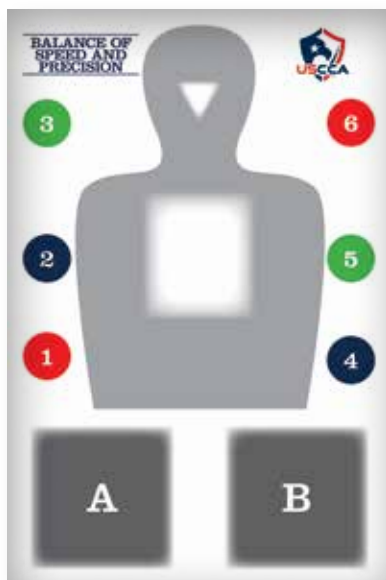
tions it places on you to recreate sport environment performance on choreographed stages when you are truly scared. Train to break your physical and emotional focus on a downed threat and start immediately looking for others who may mean you or yours harm. Unless you get attacked by bad guys who are all duct-taped together, swinging through a plate rack isn't realistic multiple-target training.

### THE ‘MULTIPLE-TARGET ENGAGEMENT DRILL’

When you get started with these concepts on the live-fire range, discipline yourself to run the drill properly, in the spirit of counter-ambush training. As seen in the photo at the beginning of this chapter, stage two targets (or one target with two high-center-chest target areas) and then call out “left” or “right” for your training partners. You should engage the first target from the holster (if that skill has been devel-

oped), integrating a full-but-simulated flinch. After you engage the first target, you should bring the gun back into the ready position and truly feign assessing the environment until you feel that you've “recognized” the second threat.

The trick in this drill is to force yourself to break your focus on the targets and the shooting tasks. Your brain has to “know” that there is still shooting to be done, and it takes conscious effort to collect and process information not related to the shooting you just finished. For this reason, it is vital that your initial command represent a series of shooting tasks that must be completed





after the assessment interruption. If a training partner waits to indicate the second part of the shooting task until after you're done assessing, you're essentially just doing multiple single-target engagements. Don't cheat yourself; it would technically be the proper physical task execution, but it's certainly not the best way to train mentally. It is the specific effort of breaking your focus on the shooting while in the middle of a drill that is most important.

On that note, the best thing to assess between targets is people around you. You should be looking at what they are doing, not just where they are. For verification, training partners should ask each other to describe what they observed between targets.

## THE 'FACING DRILL'

After you've gotten smooth with your presentation from the holster while facing your target, you should start practicing your presentation at different angles. This does not mean that you should practice shooting in any direction other than to the front when you can turn to face the target during presentation;

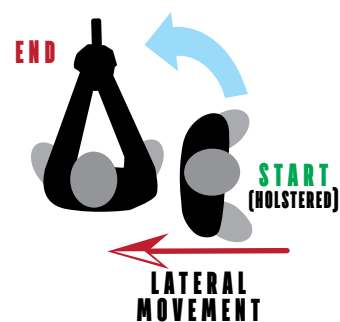
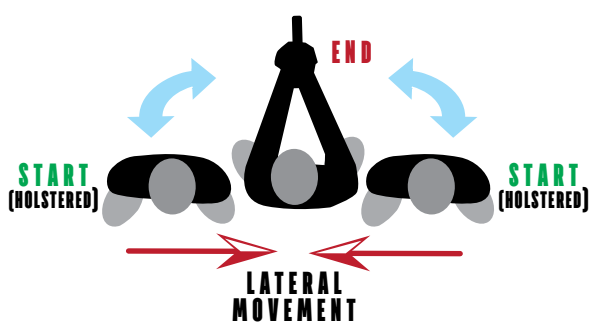
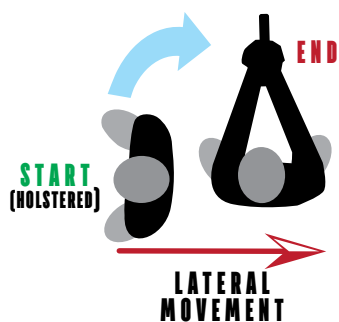
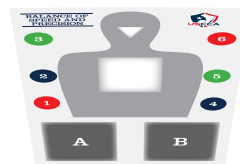
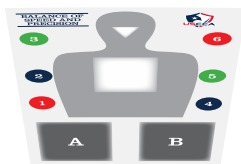
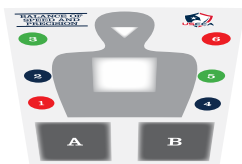
■ Integrate that startle reaction, and make sure that you employ proper technique when you run any drills that involve movement.

As seen above, proper foot movement ensures that you're never setting yourself up to fall, and when combined with smooth skills in accessing and drawing your firearm, the entire process can be a unified system that will get your firearm into your direct line of sight as quickly and safely as possible. Time spent training improperly is worse than no training at all, so start slow to build technique and only then speed up.

doing so would be contextually inappropriate. As you become more adept at presentation from the holster while standing and you want to expand your preparations, you can practice from positions where you cannot turn to face the threat, such as kneeling or seated. At that time, you will practice shooting to your sides and (eventually) even to the rear. For now, you want to utilize lateral movement to get yourself oriented toward the threat before you extend the gun. You can use the following approach with any of the practice drills instructed in these books, but it makes the most sense to follow the same progression you did when facing toward the target.

Start your "Facing Drill" by facing to your strong side, with the target off of your weak-side shoulder.

This is usually the easiest (and safest) direction in which to start. At the command, you will integrate your startle reaction prior to reaching for your gun, just as you would in any counter-ambush drill. Be sure to turn your head toward the target and move your hands protectively in that direction while lowering your center of gravity. Do not bring your hands up directly in front of your body as you did before, as that is no longer the line of



the stimulus. You are simulating a threat off to your weak side, so that is the side to which you should direct your startle reaction.

Remember that one of the most important aspects of integrating a realistic startle reaction prior to presenting your gun is that you are learning to bring your gun efficiently to your line of sight. In an actual fight, you'll be focused on whatever is posing a deadly threat. While training, looking at the target even before you reach for your gun helps you to develop this ability to a higher level and in a more realistic way. Along those lines, you should never extend your firearm into a shooting position if you're not looking at your target.

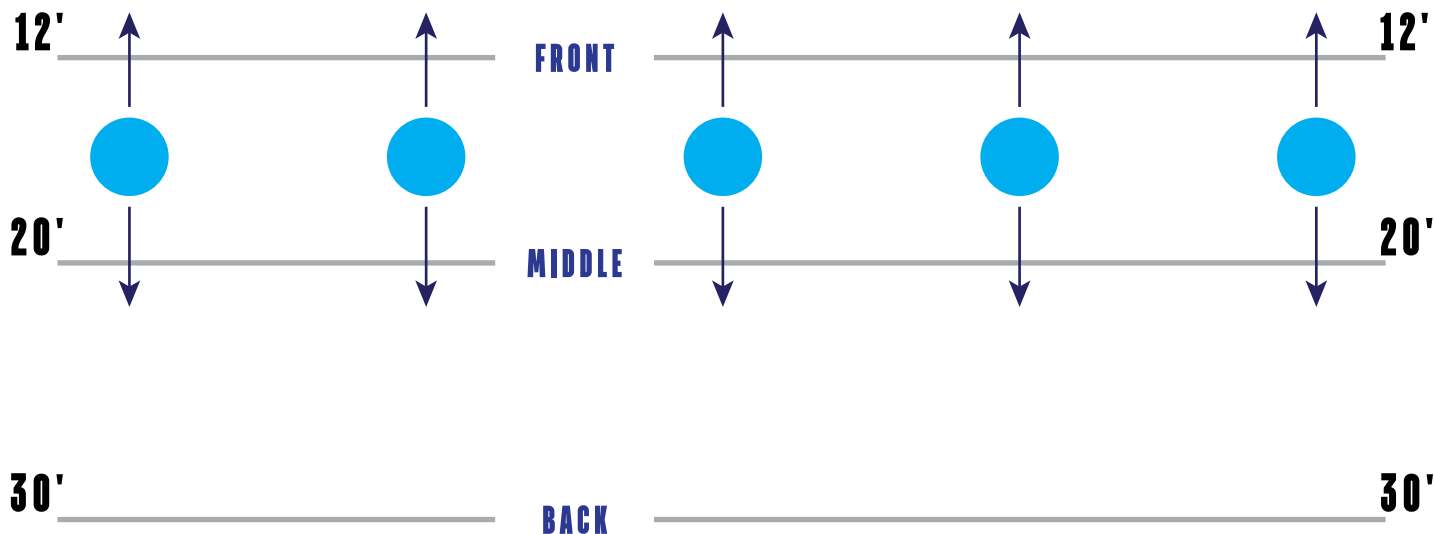
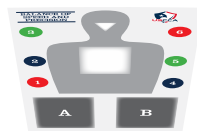
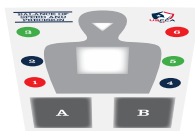
As you reach for the gun to get your grip and initiate your offline movement, turn your body so that you are orienting your hips toward the threat. The gun should not come out of the holster until you're facing downrange, no different than when you first started practicing your presentation. From here, you complete the drill

as normal all the way through holstering your gun. At that point, you can get more practice with the threat off to your weak side or change to practicing with the threat off of your strong side.

After you've practiced facing to the left and right for a while, you can face uprange, putting the target behind you. When you do this, you need to be sure that you follow your timing rule and that you are quickly getting your body turned around as you reach for your gun so that you don't negligently point the gun in any direction other than at your target.

When training with the target behind you, it is important to practice looking over both shoulders and turning in both directions. Be sure to turn toward whichever shoulder you look over though. You can't predict the exact angle of the stimulus you are reacting to, so you can't choreograph which direction will be the most efficient to turn.





### THE 'WIND SPRINT DRILL'

The "Wind Sprint Drill" is a more advanced version of the "Tactical Stroll Drill" you learned in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*. This drill requires a training partner and is most meaningful if done with at least two other shooters at the same time. This drill forces you to pay more attention to your surroundings than any other drill in the program.

Before participating in this drill, all participants must have learned and practiced presenting their firearms from their holsters with the integration of startle reactions, safely completed the "Facing Drill" and have developed an understanding of their personal balances of speed and precision. Each target should be a high-center-chest-sized circle, square, oval or rectangle. You should establish at least three shooting lines, but no more than five, that should be clearly identified. Each line will be assigned a designated command that will indicate that the shoot-

ers should move rapidly to that line.

Part of this drill is simply learning to recognize how to apply skills at different general ranges, so be sure to have a significant distance between each line. The furthest line should be at least twice as far from the targets as the closest, as small differences in distance wouldn't be as recognizable to shooters and would likely not result in the desired effect. The typical line distances I use in my instruction are 12, 20 and 30 feet.

In live classes, I define "rapidly" simply by saying that anyone who considers himself or herself a generally fast person should move at about 75 percent of his or her potential speed and that, if he or she considers himself or herself generally slower than average, he or she should push to 90 percent of his or her potential. This tends to keep everyone basically even as they move. When I use three lines, I will use the commands "front," "middle" and "back" to indicate where I want the students to run. If you



### Step 1

- Move rapidly to the position indicated by your training partner.



### Step 2

- When given the shooting command, stop moving and incorporate the startle reaction.



### Step 3

- Initiate the learned responses of lateral movement and proper presentation from the holster.



### Step 4

- After in a shooting position, engage your target with a multiple-shot string of fire.



### Step 5

- Pause at the ready position and assess your environment after each string of fire.



### Step 6

- Reholster your gun.

- The “Wind Sprint Drill” is an advanced version of the “Tactical Stroll Drill” (shown above). Establish at least three but no more than five shooting lines, each assigned a designated command that will indicate to shooters that they should move rapidly to that specific line.

use more lines, you can use numbers or colors to easily identify the lines (the latter if you have colored markers to correspond to the line you're calling). When a line command is called, students should move to the line and then simply wait while facing the targets. Remind students not to back-peddle and not to imagine that they are moving toward or away from a threat. They are simply moving for the sake of movement.

When explaining this drill to students, I also emphasize the standard safety command on my ranges — “Stop!” — which means to literally stop doing anything except assessing the environment to see what the issue might be. Stop running, stop shooting, stop reloading, stop holstering ... just stop. This command can be called by anyone on the range any time he or she thinks something dangerous is about to happen. In that vein, it's imperative to establish that any command replaces or interrupts any and all previous commands. The next command that needs to be established is the command to fire; typically, I use the “Up!” command as a default. It's possible to mix in additional cognitive processing as well as an advanced version, with each shooter having more than one possible target, such as a pair of chest-sized targets labeled “1” and “2.” At the shooting command, each shooter should immediately simulate a startle reaction, stopping his or her running to a line, if necessary, but with all of the safety rules with regard to presenting the firearm from the “Facing Drill” and the “Tactical Stroll Drill” still in place. Each shooter must make eye contact with his or her target before reaching for his or her gun and must have his or her body facing the threat before the gun comes out of the holster.

When first using this drill, shooting commands should only be given after shooters have reached a line. As shooters become more comfortable, commands can be called while the shooters are moving.

In this drill, it is vital that each student check to ensure that no other shooter is more than an arm's reach in front of him or her before removing his or her gun from the holster. It is the responsibility of the shooter who is the furthest from the target to move forward in that case (or simply call out “Stop!” and reset the drill). This is the most dynamic and objectively dangerous drill conducted at the fundamental level of this program, and part of the drill is learning to apply your shooting and gun-handling skills while maintaining awareness of what is going on around you and ensuring the safety of yourself and others.

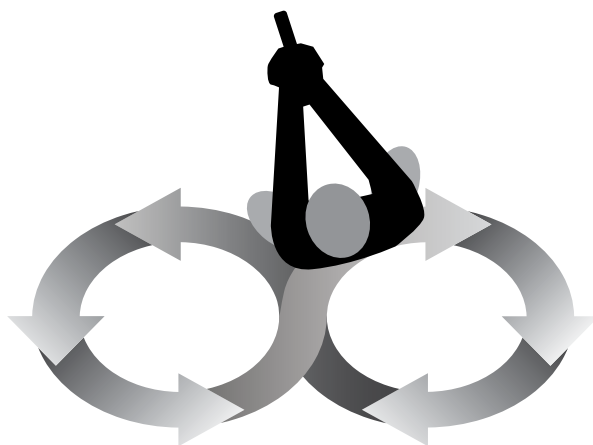
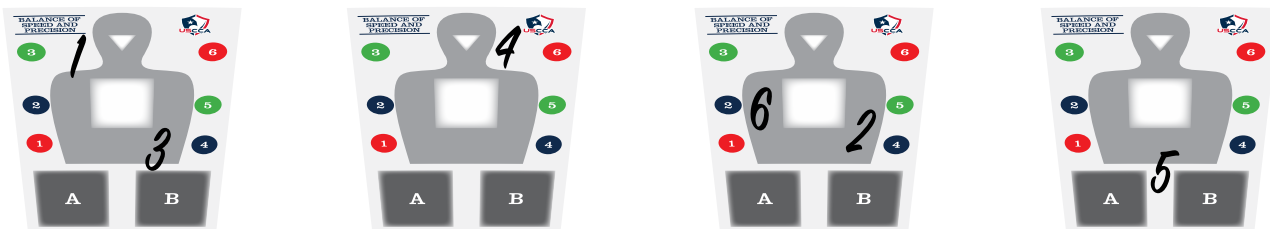


### THE ‘TAKE A LAP DRILL’

This drill is comprised of a series of laps around the Balance of Speed & Precision (BoS&P) target's six small circles and gives you an opportunity to practice assessing while you shoot and transition realistically between threats. You and your training partners can change each “lap” so that no one falls into a pattern; you might require one or two hits on each circle (threat) before you move to the next. You might go in order from one to six or you might go every other (odd) circle followed by the remaining (even) circles in order. While changing the instructions will help keep you on your toes and help you develop the ability to switch between using intuitive sighted fire and assessing the threat efficiently, the exact course of the lap you take around the target is not the focus of the drill.

When used as a regular part of your training, the most important aspect of this drill is that you treat each circle as a separate threat. If you don't hold yourself to high-integrity contextual training, you will find yourself swinging your gun from circle to circle instead of assessing and trying to finish your lap quickly and effectively. You do not need to use the small numbered circles on the BoS&P target. You can use any target that presents the same type of visual reference or make your own series of small circles or dots on any paper with spray paint. Just remember that target size plays a huge role in your balance of speed and precision as you run this drill. Plan wisely.





## THE 'FIGURE 8 DRILL'

The most important drill that we use in this program to evaluate a shooter's ability to apply skills in context on a square range is the "Figure 8 Drill." Its development and application have evolved over time and have served many purposes, but its history in the program dates back to the 1990s.

One afternoon at the range, an instructor acquaintance threw a couple of empty ammo boxes on the ground about 10 or 15 feet from the target stands and had me walk in a Figure 8 around and through them. He'd call "Up!" and I would turn toward the targets and engage appropriately.

For years, I used this drill sparingly, usually with more advanced students, to teach reaction in 360 degrees, and it wasn't until I had more access to 360-degree ranges that I realized the incredible power of it.

I use the "Figure 8 Drill" in all aspects of training to test skills in 360 degrees. Whether you're looking at holster presentation, tar-

get identification, executive protection targets, low-light tactics, multiple shooters or just about any other skill you can imagine, there is a way to integrate the "Figure 8 Drill." Rarely do I teach a shooting class where someone doesn't comment at the end about how he or she can't wait to share the "Figure 8 Drill" with his or her unit, agency, students or shooting buddies.

The easiest way to set up an entry-level "Figure 8 Drill" is to put up a single silhouette target about 10 feet from the two marks around which the shooter will walk. If you're shooting this drill, you should be applying everything you've learned in this program in your response to the "fire" command. Train on this drill until you achieve competence, and then — just like everywhere else — it's time to move forward.

The next evolution is to use multiple targets with numbers spray-painted onto them, using the numbers as the firing commands. Instead of using numbers, different types of realistic silhouettes can be used and corresponding one-word descriptions



### Step 1

■ Begin walking in a Figure 8 pattern around two marks.



### Step 2

■ On the shooting command, incorporate the startle reaction in the direction of the targets.



### Step 3

■ While identifying the target called in the shooting command, initiate the learned responses through engaging the target with a multiple-shot string of fire.

(such as shirt colors) can be the target calls. If resources and range safety allow, targets can be set up staggered from the Figure 8 area to create bystanders and obstructions to clear shots on some targets. Similarly, reactive three-dimensional targets or steel can also be used. Keep in mind this drill should only be run after the shooter in question is comfortable and confident with presentation from the holster and all normal range safety protocol.

Speaking of which, use the same safety protocols and timing from the “Facing Drill” and the “Wind Sprint Drill” to prevent guns from being pointed in unsafe directions. The shooter must recognize the threat and orient toward it before presenting from the holster, but the grip may be attained during this movement prior to the gun coming up and out. Shooters can be kept honest by occasionally having non-existent targets called to represent “no-shoots.”

To be used efficiently and safely, this drill requires at least one training partner. As you progress, you can use more and more cognitively complex commands, as well as a more chaotic target array. For training in the context of home defense or similar environments, you can also place a barricade on the range, adjacent to your Figure 8 walking pattern, to represent a point of cover around which to shoot or move to during reloads. The variations on how to use the Figure 8 are limited only by safety and your creativity.

## THE ‘COGNITIVE DRILL’

A “Cognitive Drill” is what I call any shooting drill that requires a shooter to concentrate on something other than shooting. I have largely discarded such drills as specific, standalone sets and have tried to increase the amount of cognitive distraction in all other drills as appropriate to a student’s ability to deal with it.

When running separately specific cognitive drills, I use a pattern of shots that the student must fire into a sequence of targets in front of him or her as the distraction on a square range.

These types of drills focus on the idea that you’re not looking to learn and train skills in isolation but rather in the face of many other distractions to the cognitive process. I now believe that this can — and should be — done much more often throughout all skill-development drills. Even normally simple drills to which you add math problems or interpretations of commands are just a start; be creative with your training partners and keeping people on their toes should be easy.



■ Left to right: Steve Fischer, Barret Kendrick, Rob Pincus, Destry Jeter, Deryck Poole

## CLOSING/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

By no means did I come to all of this knowledge alone. The list of people who've influenced the programs I've developed and the courses I teach would add countless pages to this book.

Sometimes a student or fellow instructor does something that I immediately adopt into my own teaching. Sometimes I see someone do something that I don't understand and I ask him or her, "Why?" At that point, the results vary.

Occasionally, he or she responds with an answer that clarifies something brilliant that I didn't previously understand. Other times, he or she can't explain what he or she is doing, won't explain what he or she is doing, has a nonsensical "explanation" or offers a weak subjective explanation that really doesn't answer the question — something like, "So-and-so taught me." I

detest finding out that someone is relying on a life-or-death skill or tool but has no real idea why he or she is doing it. It's always been a pet peeve of mine. That's why it is so important to me that you understand why I have recommended what I've recommended in this and *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals: Level 1*.

In addition to all of the teachers, students and peers who have influenced me, this latest evolution of my curriculum was developed in collaboration with the team of I.C.E. Certified Instructors and our partners at the USCCA. Special thanks and credit is due to Jamie Onion, Deryck Poole and Barret Kendrick, who have specifically been involved in every aspect of the production of this book and the USCCA Defensive Shooting courses.



# NOTES

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Building on the skills introduced in *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals Level 1: Training Your Mind And Body To Respond*, *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals Level 2: Training For Real-Life Scenarios* guides the serious defensive shooter through the necessary skill-building drills and techniques that can make the difference between dying and living and, equally importantly, simply living and truly prevailing.

Condensed and brought to you by the United States Concealed Carry Association, *Defensive Shooting Fundamentals Level 2: Training For Real-Life Scenarios* brings your mindset and physical training into line with the ways that the human mind and body react to stress, danger and violence. By following the curriculum contained within, you're training to be a good shot on the range and a lifesaving shot in the real world.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Pincus is a leading international personal defense educator specializing in the area of defensive shooting. He is the executive director of Personal Defense Network and owner of I.C.E. Training Company. He has conducted training courses



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