



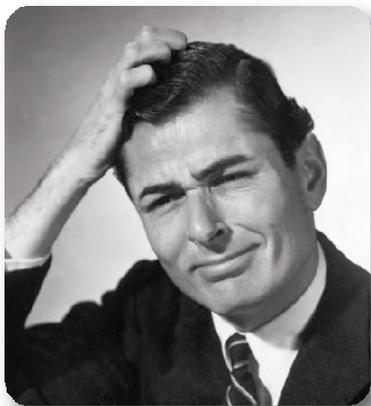
# THE CHANGING DYNAMIC OF EXPERIENCE, INTUITION, & TECHNIQUES IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

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I read an article that puts forth the postulate that there are two classifications of techniques: “intuitive” techniques (good), and “counter-intuitive” techniques (bad).

Please see: <http://progressivecombat.com/pdfs/TomAveni-Nightshift.pdf> (published Fall of 2007)

On the surface this seems to make sense, but upon closer inspection it turns out to be entirely false.

Within the article, the author was clearly implying that the techniques he teaches are “intuitive”, and for the most part everybody else in the community is propagating the dreaded so-called “counter-intuitive” techniques. This intellectual dishonesty is the product of oversimplification, a string of fallacies and pride. “Intuitive” verses “non-intuitive” techniques is a false dichotomy. The consequences of improper training, false foundations and ignorance are severe.

First let’s put the definitions on the table:

**Intuitive:** perceiving by intuition, as a person or the mind.

**Intuition:** direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process; immediate apprehension (perception on a direct and immediate level.)

- a fact, truth, etc., perceived in this way.
- a keen and quick insight.

**Technique:** method of performance; way of accomplishing.

technical skill: the ability to apply procedures or methods to affect a desired result.

Let’s step out of the weeds and soar to 40,000 feet.

Warriors, police officers, and those engaged in security functions have chosen a profession that for all practical purposes should be considered “counter-intuitive”. The instinct to stay safe and alive is primal yet these professionals by their own volition choose to enter an environment of uncertainty, danger and potential death.

It’s **counter-intuitive** to leave the comfort and protection of cover, knowingly jeopardizing your own life to save the lives of others as countless heroes have done for their partners and friends. Defying natural reason, they demonstrated nobility, bravery, and a sense of honor we all revere. We rightfully hold such men and women in the highest esteem.

It’s **counter-intuitive** to jump out of an airplane in the dead of night as part of a reconnaissance team to gather intelligence deep behind enemy lines, knowing you will have little or no support if you are compromised. Yet men are trained to do so, and they do so on demand without hesitation in defense of their country.



It's **counter-intuitive** for men to place their bodies between hand grenades and hostages, knowing they themselves will die. Yet this is exactly what some of the soldiers of Russia did in Beslan for the hundreds of innocent school children caught in a horrendous situation at the hand of Chechenian terrorists.

It's **counter-intuitive** to take orders and hold your ground in a fierce battle when others are falling, and your internal programming is screaming out to run, run, run.

Through the force of human will, training, fortitude, and self-sacrifice these things and more are accomplished. I despise that which would undermine people of such character.

### **From Unfamiliarity to Intuitive – It's a Process (and it doesn't come overnight)**

As a professional at arms, take the time to go over in your mind the skill sets you currently "own" so to speak. Contemplate those things that you might be accomplishing with relative ease, quickly perceiving what is happening and doing what must be done with conscious thought, the very definition of intuitive behavior.

After you compile that list, note that almost everything on that list involves specific knowledge, techniques, and procedures, many of which can vary group to group. Regardless of the technique or procedure you use to complete these tasks, were they all always "intuitive" to you? Did they initially "feel" right and all fall into place when you first went through the correct and accepted procedures as taught by the training staff? Then they were not intuitive at the time, were they?

**News flash here:** Developing the optimal intuitive responses requires effort on your part, and in many cases specific, focused, and hard work. You are not hardwired to do many of the tasks required of you as a human being. However, you are highly adaptable and capable of a wide range of skill acquisition and tasking given the proper knowledge and training.

### **Try to climb Mount Everest on "intuitive techniques" and see how far you get!**

Moving away from the world of conflict and crisis for a moment, I would like you to travel in your mind into your vehicle on your way to work. You position your keys without effort, slip them into ignition without conscious thought, turn over the engine, slip the transmission into gear and off you go.

As you leave the familiar surroundings of your own neighborhood, to merge onto the faster roadways, you settle into a routine that from your conscious point of view is quite easy to manage.

### 3 *Experience, Intuition, & Techniques*

But if you took the time to make a comprehensive list of the processes, the adjustments, the visual and audio cues, the literally life and death decisions you are making moment by moment, the list would be staggering. It's a complex network of possible orientations, decisions, and actions with serious consequences for error. Yet you drive your vehicle almost every day into the dangerous dynamic, and for the most part return home safely without incident.

If you can think back, the first time you sat behind the wheel this was not the case. You did not innately possess an intuitive set of techniques to address the procedure of driving. Step-by-step and day-by-day the individual skills required were patched together. Over time, like millions of individuals before, you have integrated all the necessary separate processes into a seamless whole. Most of the "work" is now done on a sub-conscious level.



Now take this same task of driving and add one on-duty police officer, or one soldier, or one security contractor in Iraq. In addition to driving the vehicle to get from point A to point B, that person would be faced with the additional processes and pressures of radio traffic, loud noises, computer displays, previous briefings and emerging intelligence, all immersed in the unrelenting pressure of having to view your surroundings from a perspective of predator and prey as it relates to the surroundings.

When something catches your attention in many cases it is fact your "intuition" (direct perception of truth) that is cueing this up and sets in motion your next set of decisions and potential actions.

Again, was this always so? When you first started the job, did you have this "intuitive" feel for what was happening in your surroundings? The answer is No; there is no way you could interpret the data and correctly analyze the complex and changing inputs like you do now. Why is that?

## Let's look at "Intuitive"



These images of course come from actual gun battles in Liberia. Humorous, yes, but are we to encourage others we train to fight like this because these types of "intuitive" techniques and movements are revealed in battle.

I could make a powerful argument using pseudo-scientific words, leading language, and statistics to encourage you to use these "intuitive" techniques.

I think my point is made. It's ludicrous to follow the "do only what comes natural" crowd. What you need to know and execute just might involve complexity and understanding.

Proper training over time leads to proficiency, period. There is NO WAY around it. If you run across somebody claiming to have a wonder intuitive-approach curriculum, I would be exceptionally cautious.

*“If it's intuitive, by definition, out of the gate, as it were, it's not taught. It's inherent in the body's physiology. Hence, this “counter-intuitive techniques” position would imply that what you are doing is counter to what “inheres” within one's basic apparatus. This analysis is very similar to the old “instinct” proposition, e.g., that there are certain shooting positions that are “instinctual.” Instinctual means that some given behavior is “species specific,” capable of being demonstrated with maximum proficiency at best with no learning w/ respect to how to do the behavior and at worst, demonstrating full competency w/ one trial to acquisition.” - Dr. Anthony Semone*

Let me give you some basic practical examples that should jump right out at you:



You are driving your vehicle at a high rate of speed in the mountains, cliff on the outside of the corner. Suddenly your vehicle loses traction because it hits a relatively small patch of “black ice”

What would a brand-new driver do intuitively?

**Answer:** Intuitively grab onto the steering wheel and slam on the brakes creating further loss of traction. What would be the consequence?

What would an experienced driving instructor, racecar driver or anybody who spends time on the ice do immediately and intuitively?

You are learning to fly a small single engine aircraft; you are just rolling of the runway on takeoff and the plane suddenly stalls (no more lift) and begins to lose altitude.

What would a brand-new student pilot do?

**Answer:** Intuitively and immediately, pull up hard on the controls in a fruitless attempt to keep the aircraft from going down...dead in a few seconds.

What would a more seasoned pilot intuitively do? **Answer:** Push down on the controls to change the angle of attack on the wings so that the aircraft would fly and not fall out-of-control to the earth. Once the aircraft is flying it can be recovered, preventing a sudden collision with the earth.



What does somebody who has never been punched in the face intuitively do when they perceive that a threatening punch is coming their direction? **Answer:** Cringe and get hit anyway.

What does an individual who has been trained to see and counter a punch intuitively do in the exact same situation? You get the idea.

The fact of the matter is that in each case, the initial, predictable “intuitive” responses of inexperienced, unknowledgeable, and unskilled individuals lead to severe injury or death. But the trained, knowledgeable and skilled individuals have a much greater probability of escaping from their dangerous situations to live another day.

In each case a new response (formally so-called “counter-intuitive”) was inculcated through training and used in order to operate and respond effectively.

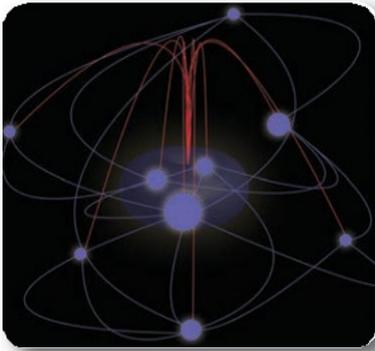
I could write an entire treatise on what the intuitive responses of novice shooters are as well as when individuals and teams are first immersed into force-on-force drilling and scenarios both day and night.

Again, the undisputed fact of the matter is that most of their initial “intuitive” reactions are ineffective and lead to a predictable death spiral.

### **Time and Repetition – Trial and Error – Evaluation – Integration – Improvement**

I submit that because of the constant exposure, the repetition day in and day out, and through the tedious process of trial and error, and proper orientation through useful training, you now have an intuitive feel for what is happening around you.

What was once disjointed, overwhelming, overlooked or misinterpreted is now seamless, obvious and accurate.



I also further submit, that your intuition can be continually improved by a conscious effort to understand the environment you work within, creating the habit of breaking all processes down to their core components, disassembling them and reassembling them with a view to improve efficiency. In plain terms, think about them. Roll them over in your mind.

Ask yourself constantly, why is this so? Can it be improved?

Believe there is a better way, and you may find it.

This process of disassembly and reassembly will allow your mind to reduce processing time the next time a decision juncture is arrived upon. You don’t “think” about it anymore, you just do it and you do it well. At some point you will have probably tried the newly assembled approach multiple times in the course of your duties. You make judgments about the results one way or the other.

One would say at this point you have what is described in the Greek word **gnosko**, the type of knowledge based on experience.

Experience being the observing, encountering, or undergoing of things generally as they occur in the course of time: knowledge or practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, encountered, or undergone

**Gnosko** does not mean the type of knowledge based on being intellectually informed only, it is a qualitatively different type of knowledge.

*“Veteran officers especially are experts at spotting body language signals and verbal cues that are precursors to nefarious intent”  
Lt. Jim Glennon, Lomard III. Police Department*

**Experience and Intuition are co-partners enhancing your capabilities to prevail.**

Let’s take a short detour into exactly how you gain experience, as it is an interesting interplay.

In some cases, you are told or shown something by someone who has done it before and lives to tell

the tale. On this basis alone they have X amount of credibility. That being said, right then and there, as the new information is inbound, you go through an internal cross-checking/validation of what you are hearing or being shown. It goes into one of three piles; Reject, Accept, or to be Verified.

The more experienced individual (the trainer) is trying to plow the mental ground for you so that you (the trainee/student) don’t have to work so hard to break through the hard surface layer.

Oftentimes, especially in the realm of tactical training, this presentation is expressed in the form of a technical sequence or procedure. As the technique is queued up to the thinking man, the immediate questions should include:



*How difficult, complicated, lengthy, and repeatable is the technique or procedure being shown?*

*What time frames are involved to transfer this particular sequence to another so that they have competency with it?*

*How does this stack up with what I already know to be true or useful?*

*Is this better or worse than what I am currently utilizing to solve the situation?*

In other cases, nobody told you or showed you anything, during the presentation of life you were thrust into an unfamiliar situation, and you lived to tell the tale. You have new experience.

You know the proverb, *“Good judgment comes from experience, experience comes from bad judgment”*.

When someone tries to convince you that this is “intuitive” and that is not, your first counter question should be, “For whom? A 2-year-old, an “average” person, or a physically fit / intelligent / diligent / constantly training with a view to improve / combat experienced individual?”

To say that sets of techniques which have been validated in actual combat are intuitive or not intuitive for any given population is stating too much. There are quite a few valid approaches that achieve the desired effect. It has been my experience that folks who claim they are the only ones who have cracked the code are usually full of bovine excrement.

A more valid statement would be, “I disagree with the following approach because of A, B, and C. I have found in my personal experience that D, E, and F are more effective because...”

However, in our community we are plagued with individuals and organizations adamantly telling us that their part of the alphabet constitutes the entire framework of language. They often use emotionally charged language and ad hominem arguments to advance their positions.

Rather than carp about what others may or may not be doing, I believe it is much better to project ideas forward that people can work with. Be mindful not to waste your energy bashing others’ perspective but look to improve your own game with a view to lift others up around you. You have far to go. If you believe otherwise, you are a walking disservice to those you are training.

I have spent most of my career as a trainer attempting to find the tipping point for the audiences I address. I want to utilize the time I have with them to the maximum degree. If post-training critiques consistently revealed something to the effect that “This is too much, too complicated, not germane, not relevant, not transferable”, and I consistently ignored that direct feedback, then I would be a fool.

As a trainer, you must be flexible and simply understand and acknowledge that some learning methodologies and techniques are better than others for any given human endeavor and that is what we should be seeking. Guess what? You don’t know them all! Keep climbing the mountain!!!

Some trainers function in an institutional setting with raw recruits and some are dealing with seasoned veterans and fellow trainers. The expression of their training and goals quite logically ought to take on a different complexion and emphasis. Why do folks that train certain populations feel the need to take shots at folks training other segments of the population? Insecurity, pride, ego, ignorance, lack of wisdom and understanding. Who knows? I have split my 40+ years as a trainer almost down the middle between highly regimented and controlled institutional training to very specialized almost custom training curriculums, so I can see on both sides of the fence.

***Are you going to teach your students what feels right for them at this juncture, or are you going to teach them that which you believe to be right and effective in the longer run?***

The fact of the matter is that what was intuitive for me now was not intuitive 20 years ago. New things, new procedures, new techniques don't feel right as first. Of course, they don't!!! You don't have the repetitions in.

The desire of any trainer or coach should be a genuine attempt to shorten the learning curve for the next generation. Imbedded in that desire should be the constant process of comparing and contrasting to determine which is better between two or more viable techniques. It can be a difficult journey, but navigable and rewarding. Like any other journey, you must know where you are and where you want to end up.

Assuming you have the backing of your chain-of-command, determine that destination. Where would you like your audience to be? Establish the endgame or the goals. Break the larger goals into smaller, bite-sized objectives.

Assess the target audience's current capability and willingness to advance forward. If nobody wants to go where you are going, then you have a problem to start with!

Don't underestimate or overestimate your target audience. Creating a motivating environment is exceptionally important.

***Can you do what you want your audience to do?***

Can you step up and demonstrate on demand? If you can't, I would stop right there and find somebody who can! The ability to tell and show as opposed to just tell is the difference between night and day.

Assess the resources required to achieve those objectives and ultimately accomplish the goals. What is available? I.E. Internal expertise/instructors, facilities, expendables, and the all-important component of time required for initial competency and maintained competency of those technical skills and knowledge.

Pour all this into the blender and assess the realistic probabilities of getting to the desired destination. If you cannot achieve the goal, then the harsh reality of “I can’t get there from here” sets in. You can fight/lobby for more resources, look for a better use of the allotted time to still achieve the goal, or reassess your goals and expectations.

Fight and fight hard internally and externally to keep your goals and expectations high. Do not give up easily.

In larger organizations, if you can affect a small degree of change you have accomplished something. Overtime that new trajectory you created will pay dividends.

It’s a process that lives and breathes if you will. You should maintain a student’s attitude your whole life, or much will pass you by. You should be sensibly critical, but not overly hostile, to new ideas. Let your mind meditate on them until they either become workable or irreconcilable.

For the ones you keep, be willing to let them go if a simpler, more reliable one can take its place. Maybe the new concept or technique is an augmentation of something else that is solidified.

In conclusion, your repertoire and your responses are shaped, expanded and contracted by constant training and personal experience in the environment you work in.

### ***They change over time.***

The argument that we should only do what is initially intuitive and easy falls so desperately short of any sound reason.

Techniques are neither “intuitive” nor “counter-intuitive” in and of themselves. They have context and life within framework of human perception and capability.

They are useful or non-useful, validated or invalidated by a completely different set of criteria varying from individual to individual, from group to group, and from mission to mission.

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