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RAPID THREAT RECOGNITION

Training Manual

For Law Enforcement & Security Professionals

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In Omni Paratus — Semper Observari

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MY MISSION

I spent more than four decades in law enforcement, corporate security, and training. I have stood on street corners at two in the morning trying to read a situation that could go any direction. I have walked through executive boardrooms and warehouses and airports applying the same discipline — the same fundamental act of looking carefully at the world around me and understanding what I was seeing. What I learned, over those years, is that the most important skill in this profession is also the most undertrained. We spend enormous effort teaching officers to respond. We spend almost no time teaching them to see.

That gap has cost lives. I have no doubt about that. And it has driven every hour I have spent developing the Rapid Threat Recognition program.

My mission is straightforward. I want every law enforcement officer, every security professional, every person responsible for the safety of others to have what the best of us have — not as an accident of experience, not as a gift they were born with, but as a trained and practiced skill that they carry into every situation they face. I want them to be able to see what others miss.

Everything in this program exists in service of that mission. The research, the exercises, the frameworks, the stories — all of it is aimed at the same target. Not to make you faster on the draw. Not to make you more aggressive. To make you more aware. To close the gap between what your eyes take in and what your brain registers as meaningful. To give you the fraction of a second that changes outcomes.

That is worth fighting for. I have spent the better part of my professional life fighting for it. Rapid Threat Recognition is part of that fight. And now it is in your hands.

FOREWORD

Law enforcement and security personnel at times make decisions with very little information available and even less, time. This time criticality is because either rapidly changing circumstances that unfold unexpectedly and spontaneously allowing little time to decide, or an individual officer is locked into a complacent mindset where his Boyd Cycle is turned off, misses critical information unfolding progressively, and is caught unprepared. Decision making in both cases is made more difficult due to little information being picked up on and processed. Law enforcement and security officers find themselves in these types of situations all too often. If not prepared through training, education, experience and backed up by strong character and leadership, time-critical decisions do not get made, and the advantage goes to the adversary.

To gather and process incoming information in rapidly changing circumstances requires judgment and decision making without all the facts. Due to intuition built through experience, we gain situational awareness — there is a lot of information an experienced decision maker uses that was simply not available in earlier stages. To pick up on this information, the signs and signals, we must have our individual Boyd Cycle “turned on.” The Boyd Cycle (OODA Loop) is a subconscious and conscious act, a cycle of observation, orientation, decision and action that we use in our daily routines to make decisions.

Col. Boyd explained that a person in a conflict must observe the environment, to include himself, his adversary, the moral, mental and physical situation, and potential allies and opponents. He must orient to what it all means — “what’s going on” — which is part of the ongoing process throughout the situation. Orientation involves the information observed, one’s genetic heritage, social environment and prior experiences (birth to present) that form our picture of the situation. The results one forms during the orientation phase must be decided upon, and an attempt made to carry out the decision — he must act.

Rapid Threat Recognition is a performance-centric skill training that provides the observation training that has, until now, not been developed or offered to law enforcement. If you think you are a “trained observer,” ask yourself: when was I trained, and who trained me?

Unfortunately, developing visual acuity and observation skills has been grossly overlooked, yet it is an even more important tool than the firearm you carry.

Today, law enforcement officers and security professionals are facing challenges that require the ability to maintain visual acuity and rapid recognition skills, both on and off duty. Not having these skills puts you at extreme risk. RTR can give you the cutting edge you need for survival and victory.

This training is a must for any law enforcement or security officer, and any agency whose responsibility it is to detect, deter, disrupt, prevent or respond to ongoing conflict and violence.

Stay Oriented!

Lieutenant Fred T. Leland, Jr.

Director / Principal Trainer, Law Enforcement and Security Consulting (www.lesc.net)

DISCLAIMER

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Rapid Threat Recognition is a methodology to help train individuals to see images at greater speeds. Much like a physical workout, every individual is unique, and results of any training program vary. Observation On Demand, LLC, hereafter referred to as O2D, John L. Demand, Jr., and any associates of O2D make no guarantees as to the results of Rapid Threat Recognition training. We have based the training on the latest findings in brain research and the discovery of brain plasticity, but individual skill levels prior to and following training are influenced by an extreme number of individual variables — e.g., eyesight, age, medical history, prior experience, genetics, etc. — such that results cannot be implied or guaranteed.

It is extremely important to note that Rapid Threat Recognition and observation are only a piece in the totality of circumstances of every situation. The purpose of the program is to increase the ability to recognize visual cues and to do so more rapidly, but it is by no means the definitive cause and effect for critical decision making. Context, situational awareness, pattern recognition, and individual skill levels — both mental and motor — play a significant role in the judgment of any situation and must be taken into account during critical decision making.

ALL SITUATIONAL JUDGMENTS MUST INCLUDE THE TOTALITY OF CIRCUMSTANCES

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THE NIGHT THAT STARTED A JOURNEY

It was a February night in 1956. We had finished dinner. Shortly after, I heard my mother scream for my father. I was nine years old. My baby brother Jimmy had begun to convulse on my mother's lap.

It happened without warning. One moment my mother was holding him, and the next his tiny body was shaking in a way that made no sense — violent, rhythmic, completely beyond anyone's control. My mother screamed for my father. He came immediately.

My father was not a man who rattled easily. He was six foot four, a decorated World War II veteran who had earned the Silver Star for heroic conduct under fire. He was the person in any room that other people looked to when something went wrong. He was, in every way that mattered to a nine-year-old boy, indestructible.

He looked at Jimmy. He looked at my mother. And then he did the only thing he could think to do. He ran to the phone and called the police.

There was no 911 in 1956. When something went wrong — a medical emergency, an accident, anything that exceeded what a family could handle on its own — you called the police. They came in station wagons that doubled as ambulances, and they were expected to know what to do in situations that most people never trained for and never encountered twice.

We waited. My mother held Jimmy, who was burning with fever. My father stood near them, trying to offer comfort he wasn't sure how to give. I remember the look on both of their faces. It was something I had never seen before and did not have a word for at the time. It was helplessness. Pure and total helplessness in two people who had never seemed helpless to me before. Then, in the distance, I heard a siren.

I moved to the front window and watched the single red rotating light — what officers called a Mars light — come slowly down our block. I went to the door and opened it, and there he was.

I was nine years old, so everything adults wore looked large on them. But this man looked enormous. He was wearing a grey shirt and blue pants with a gold stripe running down the sides. There was a silver star on his chest, a hat on his head, and a gun on his belt with the bullet loops containing silver bullets. He looked, to me, exactly like Superman. Not metaphorically. Literally. I had watched Superman on our small black-and-white television and this man, standing in my doorway with the cold February air coming in around him, looked like he had stepped directly out of that screen.

He saw my mother holding Jimmy. He didn't hesitate.

"Ma'am," he said, "where is your bathtub?"

My mother stared at him. "Upstairs," she said. "Would you fill it with cold water," he said, "and please let me hold your son." I had no idea what a bathtub had to do with anything.

They ran upstairs. I followed, because no one told me not to. My mother turned on the cold water and the officer knelt beside the tub and lowered Jimmy — this tiny convulsing baby — into the water, keeping one hand beneath his head. He held him there for several minutes, calm and steady, while the rest of us stood and watched and didn't speak.

The convulsions subsided. The fever began to break. He wrapped Jimmy in a towel and they proceeded to the station wagon. He handed Jimmy to my mother and told my father not to follow but to meet them at the hospital.

Jimmy recovered fully. He is still with us today.

The doctor later explained to my mother that the officer had once responded to a similar call — a child with extreme roseola, a fever-driven illness that can cause violent convulsions in infants. The emergency room doctors had explained to him that lowering the child's body temperature was the critical intervention. He had filed that away. He had no idea when or whether he would ever need it again. And then one February night he needed it.

I have often thought about what would have happened if a different officer had responded to that call. One who hadn't been to that particular emergency room. One who hadn't had that specific conversation with those specific doctors. My brother might have arrived at the hospital still convulsing. The outcome might have been different.

That thought has never entirely left me.

The following summer, on the Fourth of July, my mother took my sister, Jimmy and me to a pharmacy on the main street that had a soda fountain along one wall. It was the kind of place that barely exists anymore — chrome stools, a counter, a man in a white apron.

We had barely sat down when I saw him come in. I grabbed my mother's arm. "It's him," I said. "It's him. The officer that saved Jimmy."

I walked over to him and I thanked him for saving my brother. He looked at me and smiled.

"Johnny," he said — and the fact that he remembered my name felt like something extraordinary — "that's my job. And I'm glad I knew what to do."

He bought me a Coke. I sat next to him on one of those chrome stools and drank slowly, the way you drink something when you want it to last

It was also the moment I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Not just to wear the uniform. That part was the surface of it. What I wanted was what he had. I wanted to walk into a room where everything was falling apart and know what to do. I wanted to be the person that other people called when they ran out of answers.

I wanted, in the plainest possible terms, to know things that mattered.

In 1968 my dream came true. I took an oath to protect and serve and became a police officer.



One of my proudest moments — becoming a police officer at 21.

MODULE 1
THE GAP

The Gap

What the System Provided — and What It Left Out

Before we go any further, I want you to look at some numbers. Not because I enjoy statistics — I do not — but because these particular numbers tell a story that every officer deserves to understand. Not so you can be angry at the academy. So you can understand exactly what you are filling in by picking up this program.

The standard 21-week police academy allocates its 806 training hours in the following way:

Training Area	Hours
Firearms skills	73
Defensive tactics	65
Criminal & constitutional law	51
Health & fitness	56
Patrol procedures/techniques	52
Traffic law	26
De-escalation / verbal judo	22
Communication skills	19
Observation & visual recognition	0

In 806 total hours of training — more than twenty weeks — not a single dedicated hour is spent on the skill that comes before every other skill. Not one hour on the capacity that determines whether everything else learned gets applied correctly or catastrophically. The Bureau of Justice Statistics tracks more than forty distinct subject areas in the standard curriculum. Observation and visual recognition does not appear among them — not measured, not tracked, and not taught as a dedicated discipline nationally.

This is not a criticism of the people who designed those curricula. They are working within real constraints of time, budget, and competing priorities. It is simply a fact about what the standard formation provided — and what it did not.

What You Are Filling In

I want to be precise about what this program is and what it is not.

It is not a replacement for your tactical training, your legal knowledge, or your firearms qualification. Those things matter and they remain yours.

What this program provides is the foundation those skills were always meant to rest on. Observation is the first link in the chain. When that link is strong — when the brain has been trained to process visual information rapidly, accurately, and under stress — every other skill you carry becomes more effective.

The reason this gap has persisted is not that observation is unimportant. It is that we have never fully treated it as a trainable skill. We treat it as a natural attribute something officers either have or don't. Some are sharp. Some miss things. We tell rookies to pay attention and hope experience fills in the rest.

Experience does fill in some of it. That is why veterans survive situations that end rookies. But experience is slow, inconsistent, and purchased at enormous cost — including the cost of the mistakes made along the way.

What neuroscience now tells us — and what this program is built on — is that you do not have to wait for experience to build what experience builds. You can train the brain to see the way it needs to see, faster than experience alone would ever develop it.

NOTE

You are not waiting for a curriculum to change or a budget to be approved. This training is available to you right now, on the device you already own, on your schedule.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies, 2022 — NCJ 310041 (June 2025).
Observation and visual recognition is not a tracked curriculum category in the national academy taxonomy

The Story That Started Everything

It was early in my career. I was on what we called a street familiarization tour — my very first time out completely alone, before I had even gone through the full academy. In those days, rookies rode with experienced officers for a few weeks first and then were sent out solo to learn the streets. No partner. Just you, the car, and the radio.

I came across a vehicle parked near a gas station. A man was standing beside it looking frustrated — the way anyone looks when something mechanical is giving them trouble. Nothing about it set off any alarm. He said he had just run out of gas. I thought: somebody having a bad day with their car. That is what it looked like. That is what I decided it was before I had done any real work to figure out if that was true. I was preparing to help, when a car pulled up behind me.

The officer who got out was Lieutenant Gessler. He had no particular reason to stop. He was on his way in, heading toward the end of my shift. He stopped, took one look at the scene, and something in what he saw told him to pull over.

He walked up, looked at the vehicle, looked at the man, and took in the whole picture in seconds. Not fixing on any one thing. Just absorbing it.

The car was stolen.

There was no dramatic sign I had obviously missed. From where I was standing the scene looked identical before and after he arrived. But he had seen something I hadn't — something that didn't fit — and he had seen it almost instantly.

I stood there waiting for what I figured was coming: the senior officer steps in, the rookie steps aside, and everybody in the squad room hears about it for the next six months. That would have been fair. I had been about to help a car thief.

That is not what happened.

Lieutenant Gessler turned to me and handed me the arrest. He stepped back. He let me take the lead. He intervened only where he had to, quietly, without ever making my mistake the center of the story. He did not embarrass me. He created a space where I could recover, proceed, and learn — in that exact order.

I have thought about that choice many times over the decades, especially later when I was responsible for developing other officers. It would have been easy — and entirely justified — for him to handle it differently. Instead he taught. And the way he taught mattered as much as what he taught.

After that day I started volunteering for extra shifts whenever Gessler was working. I wanted to be in his car. I wanted to watch how he moved through situations, how he read environments, how he made calls I couldn't explain yet.

He asked the same two questions at every scene.

What do you see? What doesn't fit?

Those two questions became the foundation of everything in this program.

What Those Questions Built

Three years after those shifts with Lieutenant Gessler, I was still working as a patrol officer. I had been in a stationery store on a completely routine afternoon, looking for a notebook. On my way to the register, something on the counter caught my attention: a small display of sealing wax sticks in various colors, alongside a collection of decorative stamps for pressing imprints into the wax while it was still soft. Black wax among them. A flower design among the stamps.

I noticed it. I paid for my notebook. I left.

There was no reason to remember it. No professional relevance. No connection to anything I was working on. Just a detail, registered and filed in whatever part of the brain stores things with no immediate application.

Several weeks later I walked into the squad room and found two federal agents at a table talking with two detectives. There was a package wrapped in burlap on the table. It contained hashish. They were preparing a controlled delivery — the package had originally been sealed at both ends with black sealing wax, stamped with a flower imprint. During laboratory testing, one end had been opened and the seal destroyed. Without a matching seal, the recipient might refuse the package. Without acceptance, no possession. Without possession, no arrest.

I stood at that table and looked at the package. I looked at the broken seal. I looked at the intact flower imprint on the other end.

The stationery store came back to me with complete clarity.

I told the agents to give me twenty minutes. I drove to the store. The black wax and the flower stamp were still there. I purchased both, drove back, and resealed the package. The flower imprint on the new wax matched the original closely enough that the difference was undetectable.

The controlled delivery went forward. The recipient accepted the package and was immediately arrested. That arrest helped disrupt a larger Colombian drug operation. A week later the Chief called me in, showed me a letter from United States Customs describing the assistance as invaluable, and told me I was being promoted to detective.

I drove home that evening thinking about a stationery store counter. Not about the operation or the promotion. About the afternoon I had walked in looking for a notebook and noticed something I had no reason to notice.

That is what trained observation builds. Not just faster recognition of threats. A library of everything — filed automatically, retrieved precisely when it matters. The brain that builds that library is the same brain that this program is designed to develop.

The Gap Nobody Wants to Talk About

Ask yourself honestly: are you a trained observer?

Most people in law enforcement and security will say yes. They have years on the street. Real experience. Things they have seen that most people never will. And that experience matters — I am not dismissing it for a second.

But here is the question I want you to sit with: when were you actually trained to observe? Not trained in what to look for — trained in the physical act of seeing quickly and accurately? Who taught you that? What did that training look like?

For most officers and security professionals, the honest answer is: nobody did. We assumed that people coming into this profession already knew how to see. We trained for firearms. We trained for tactics. We trained for use of force. And then we handed people a badge and sent them into situations where the very first thing that happens — before any of that other training matters — is that they have to correctly see and identify what is in front of them.

That gap has gotten people killed.

The RTR Training Framework: Everything in this program feeds into the Observe and Orient phases of the OODA Loop — the phases law enforcement has historically undertrained.

What This Program Is

Think of it as boot camp for your eyes and your brain.

This training exercises your ability to take in information quickly and accurately — to see what is actually there rather than what you expect to see. We are going to work on how fast you can process a visual image. We are going to expand your peripheral awareness. We are going to train you to tell a threat from something that only looks like one.

That last part is critical. The goal is not just speed. Speed without accuracy kills innocent people and ends careers. The goal is speed and accuracy together — the kind of recognition that works under pressure, in low light, in a fraction of a second, when there is no time to think and everything depends on what you have already built.

In a truly dangerous moment, you do not rise to the occasion. You fall back on your training. Whatever your brain has practiced — whatever pathways it has built — that is what you will have when it matters most. This program is how you build those pathways.

The Science Behind It — In Plain Language

The most important discovery in brain science in the past hundred years is called neuroplasticity. That is a complicated word for a simple idea: your brain changes based on how you use it. It is not fixed. Every time you practice something, your brain builds and strengthens the connections associated with that skill. Do it consistently and those connections become faster, more reliable, more automatic.

What experienced officers call instinct is almost always a well-trained pathway. Lieutenant Gessler did not spot that stolen car through magic or supernatural ability. He had seen enough, been out there long enough, paid close enough attention that his brain had built a highway where mine had a dirt road.

This program is how you build that highway. And unlike physical conditioning, the gains do not require hours of daily effort. Short, consistent, focused sessions are what the research supports. You can do this.

MODULE 2**SPEED AND FLASH RECOGNITION**

The Proofreading Class That Changed Everything

In the early 1980s I was Director of Security and Safety at W.W. Grainger. A proofreading class was about as far from my job description as anything I could imagine. But I have always believed the most useful things you learn come from places you never expected, so I went.

At the front of the room the instructor had set up a piece of equipment I had never seen before. It was called a tachistoscope — a projector designed to flash images onto a screen for very precisely controlled, very brief periods of time. She dimmed the lights and flashed a seven-digit number for a fraction of a second.

Then it was gone.

She asked us to write down what we had seen. Most people got it right. She increased the speed. And again. At a certain point the exposure became so brief there was no longer any possibility of consciously reading the number. There was simply no time.

And yet people were still getting them right.

I sat with that for a long time after class. If the brain can accurately retrieve information it never consciously processed — where is that information going? And where does it come from when you need it? That question started something I would spend the next twenty years trying to answer.

World War II: The Military Already Knew

It turned out this was not new science. During World War II, a psychologist named Samuel Renshaw used a tachistoscope to train pilots and sailors to identify enemy versus friendly aircraft in fractions of a second. The Army and Navy credited that training with saving lives. What Renshaw found was that the human visual system adapts directly to the demands you place on it. Flash images faster and faster, and the brain builds new connections to handle that speed.



Dr. Samuel Renshaw with his tachistoscope. His WWII research proved that the brain can be trained to recognize images at speeds far beyond conscious thought.

In the 1950s the Southern Police Institute applied this exact methodology to law enforcement training. Professor Rolland Soule documented significant improvements in officers' perceptual speed and recognition accuracy. The program worked. Then the tachistoscope fell out of use because it was cumbersome and needed a classroom and hours of setup. The research died with the technology.

What I built with Observation on Demand takes that proven methodology and puts it in your hands on any device, at any time, in sessions that fit a working officer's schedule.

The science is not new. The access to it is.

Why We Start With Numbers

You are going to spend a lot of time in this program looking at numbers. There is a specific reason for that.

Your brain already knows numbers. You have been reading them since childhood. They are stored, recognized, and recalled quickly — which makes them the ideal starting point for training your eyes and brain to process information at higher and higher speeds.

We are also going to break a reading habit you have had since first grade. Most of us read left to right, one character at a time. We are going to train you to take in a series of numbers as a single unit — one image, absorbed all at once.

Here is why that matters right now, today, in your job. Imagine you are traveling at 35 miles per hour and a vehicle of interest is coming toward you at the same speed. Your combined closing speed is 70 miles per hour. You have less than two seconds to grab that plate. Reading it character by character is too slow. You need to take the whole thing at once.

That is a trainable skill. And everything you build doing it with numbers transfers directly to faces, to objects, to weapons, to behavioral cues in the field. You may also notice your reading ability may increase as this type of system has been used for speed reading.

HOW THE BRAIN ADAPTS

Think about a major league batter hitting a 95 mph fastball. He is not consciously thinking through the mechanics. His brain matched incoming visual information to a trained pattern and his body responded before conscious thought could catch up. That is a trained pathway built through thousands of repetitions. Flash recognition training builds the same thing for you.

What the Training Progression Looks Like

We start slow. We get the repetitions in at speeds where you can succeed. Then we increase the pressure. Your brain will struggle at certain speeds. That is not failure — that is adaptation happening. Give yourself rest. Come back. The struggle is the point.



Threat vs. Non-Threat Object Recognition: Your brain will learn to distinguish these at speeds that feel impossible at first. That speed is the whole point.

One more thing. Do not skip levels because they seem easy. The foundation matters. And here is a practical drill you can do anywhere, any time: when you are driving and there is a car ahead of you, glance at the plate for a fraction of a second, look away, and see what you retained. Look back and check yourself. Do it at every traffic light. Over time the amount you can grab in that fraction of a second will grow. That is your brain building the highway, one rep at a time.

MODULE 3**HOW WE ACTUALLY SEE**

Your Eyes Are Not a Camera

You have been using your eyes your entire life. Like most people, you have probably never spent much time thinking about how they actually work — and more importantly, how they sometimes fail. Your eyes are the intake — the lens, the receptor, the delivery mechanism. But they do not produce the image you experience. They send electrical signals to the visual cortex at the back of your brain, and your brain — based on memory, experience, expectation, and the specific training it has received — constructs what you perceive. What you see is not a recording of reality.

It is your brain's best interpretation of the signals it received.



What do you see — a young woman looking away, or an old woman in profile? Look again. Your brain is deciding.

When you look at this classic optical illusion, do you see an old woman or a young woman wearing a hat? Your brain is trying to decide which you see. Initially you saw one or the other. With a little practice you can alternate between both.

That distinction is not a semantic quibble. It is the foundation of everything in this program. Because if what you perceive is a construction — and it is — then it can be wrong. It can be shaped by what you expected rather than what was there. It can miss what your brain

Here is the first thing you need to understand, and it is the foundation of everything else in this program: your eyes and your brain are not a camera. A camera records exactly what is in front of it. Your brain does something completely different. It interprets. It fills in gaps. It takes what your eyes send and runs it through everything you have ever experienced to make sense of it.

That is mostly useful. It is what lets you walk into a room and know immediately that something is wrong before you can articulate why. But it has a dangerous flip side. Because your brain is always interpreting, it can show you what you expect to see rather than what is actually there.

Officers involved in wrongful shootings — people who pulled the trigger and later discovered the person was not armed — many of them genuinely believed they saw a gun. Their brain filled in the expectation. That is not a character flaw. That is how an untrained brain works under stress. And if you do not understand it, it can destroy you and take an innocent life with it.

What 20/20 Actually Means — And What It Doesn't

When your eye doctor tells you that you have 20/20 vision, they are measuring one specific thing: how sharp the image is when it hits your eye. That is it. It tells you nothing about how fast your brain processes that image. It tells you nothing about how accurately you recognize what you are seeing under pressure.

Two officers can have identical 20/20 vision and perform completely differently in a critical recognition situation. The variable is not their optics. It is the speed and accuracy of their cognitive processing. Get your eyes checked every year — I mean that. But understand that the number on the chart is the starting point, not the finish line.

The Gorilla Nobody Saw

There is a famous experiment every officer should know about. Researchers at the University of Illinois asked people to watch a video and count how many times players in white shirts passed a basketball. While they were counting, a person in a full gorilla suit walked right through the middle of the scene.

About half the people watching never saw the gorilla. Not because they were not looking. Because their attention was locked somewhere else, and their brain filtered out everything that did not relate to the task they had been given.

This is called perceptual blindness. And it happens on the street every single day.

When you are focused on arresting one subject, your brain can become functionally blind to what is happening just outside that focus — a second weapon, a third party moving in, a partner who is in trouble. The person who staged a distraction so their partner could act was counting on exactly this.

You cannot eliminate perceptual blindness completely. But you can train yourself to break your narrow focus periodically, expand your scan, and build the kind of peripheral awareness that catches movement you did not consciously look for. That is part of what this program builds.

The Cockpit Problem

Nowhere does perceptual blindness show up more often on the job than inside your own vehicle. Today's patrol car is loaded with technology that didn't exist a generation ago — a mobile data terminal for report writing, GPS, a dash cam, a radio, and a cell phone all within arm's reach. All of it is genuinely useful. None of it changes a basic fact about how your brain works: you cannot fully attend to two things at once. What feels like multitasking is really your attention switching rapidly back and forth, and every switch costs you awareness of whatever you just looked away from. When your eyes and mind are locked onto a screen, you are perceptually blind to what is happening around your vehicle — exactly when a threat is most likely to close the distance.



The modern patrol vehicle: more screens, more inputs, more competition for your attention than ever.

When a task is going to pull your attention — writing a report, running a plate, checking a message — choose your position first. Back into a spot where you are protected and can still scan your surroundings without effort. At night, remember that a lit-up interior makes you easier to see than you can see out. The same rule applies off duty, at a restaurant or coffee shop: pick the seat that gives you the view, and keep your back to something solid. The technology is there to help you do the job. It should never be the reason you stop watching for the thing that matters most.

We See With Our Brain, Not Just Our Eyes

About 80 percent of everything you have ever learned came through your visual system. Since the day you were born, your brain has been building a library of images and assigning meaning to them. When you see something new, your brain reaches into that library and asks: what does this match? That process is fast and useful. But it means everything you see is filtered through what you have seen before.

A seasoned officer pulling over a vehicle notices bugs smashed on the rear license plate. His brain — loaded with years of field experience — immediately flags it. Bugs are usually on the front plate. Rear plate full of bugs could mean the car was backed out of a garage. Could be stolen. The rookie next to him sees bugs on a plate and thinks nothing of it.

Same image. Completely different recognition. That is what experience builds. This training accelerates it.

Your Peripheral Vision Is a Weapon You Are Probably Underusing

Try this right now. Extend both arms straight out to your sides with your index fingers pointing up. Keep your eyes looking straight ahead. Wiggle your fingers. Slowly move your arms back until the movement disappears. That outer edge — where you can still detect motion but can no longer clearly focus — is the edge of your peripheral field.

That entire zone is live information. Movement, shapes, sudden changes. Your peripheral system picks all of it up even when you are not consciously looking there.

The problem is that most of us have trained ourselves to focus narrowly. We look at the face or the hands or the vehicle, and the rest goes soft. In this program we are going to work on holding your central focus while expanding what your peripheral vision is feeding you. It becomes a habit. And it is one of the most important survival tools you carry.

The Loop That Runs Everything

After I came back from a counterterrorism training mission in Israel in 2006, I could not stop thinking about what I had seen over there. These men and women were not necessarily bigger, faster, or better armed than American law enforcement. What separated them was something more fundamental. They had been trained from the ground up to observe — not just to respond, but to see what was forming before it fully formed. They read environments. They noticed the thing that did not fit before it announced itself as a problem.

I came home asking: what is the framework that explains this? The answer had been around since the 1950s.

MODULE 4

THE OODA LOOP AND RTR FRAMEWORK

Forty-Second Boyd

Colonel John Boyd flew jets for the Air Force and made a standing bet: starting from a position of tactical disadvantage, he could achieve weapons lock on any opponent within 40 seconds. He reportedly never lost that bet. That is how he got the name Forty-Second Boyd.

Boyd spent years trying to understand what he was doing that others were not. What he arrived at became the OODA Loop — a framework for how any intelligent actor processes a situation and decides what to do.

OODA stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, Act.

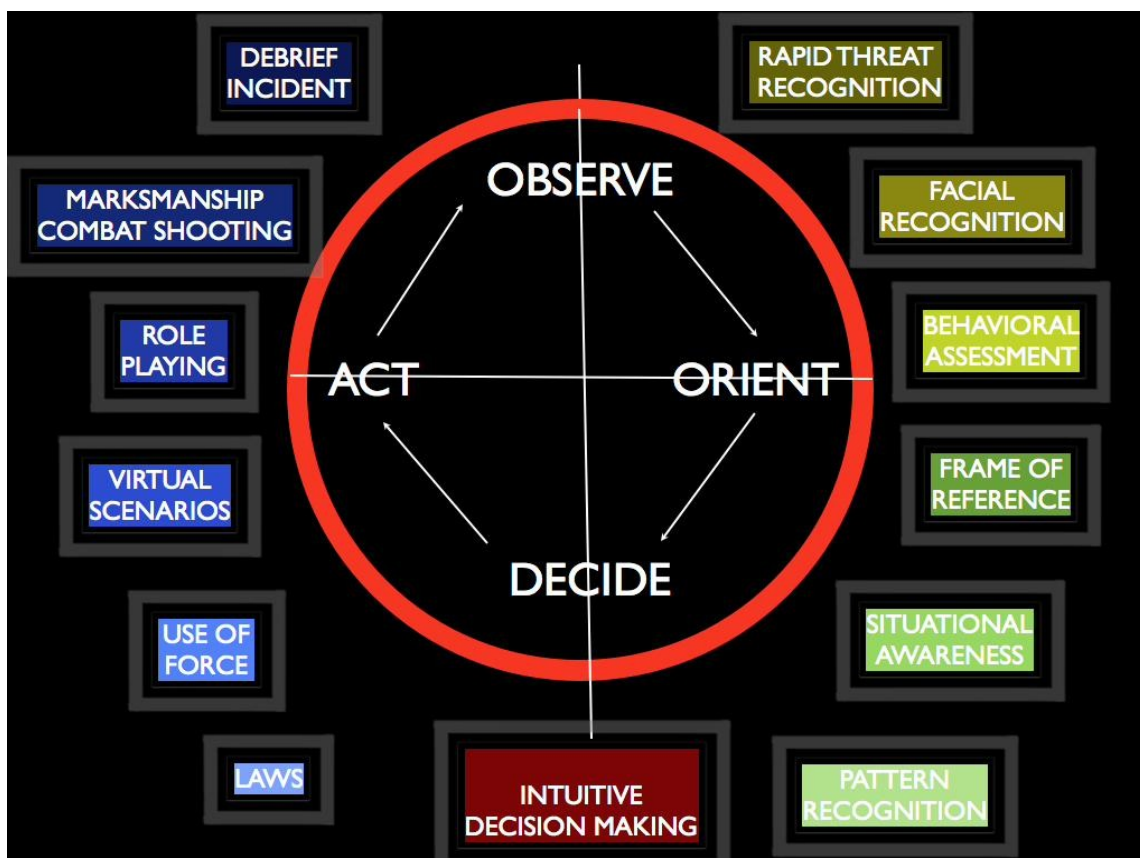
Every decision you have ever made in your life ran through some version of this loop. When you walked into a scene and immediately felt something was wrong — that was the loop running. When you knew before the radio call finished that this one was different — that was the loop running. It is always running. The question is how well you have trained each part of it.

Where Law Enforcement Training Has a Gap

When I looked at where law enforcement spends its training time, the picture was clear. Almost everything goes into Decide and Act. Use of force. Tactics. Firearms. Defensive driving. These are all important and I am not dismissing any of them.

But the loop starts at Observe. If your observation is wrong — if you missed something, saw something that was not there, or misread what was happening — then all that skill in Decide and Act gets pointed in the wrong direction. Research by Dr. Mica R. Endsley consistently shows that 76 percent of critical decision errors in high-stakes environments trace back to failures in perception. Not failures to act. Failures to correctly see.

We spend enormous resources training the end of the loop and almost nothing training the beginning. That is what this program corrects.



The O2D OODA Framework: Observe and Orient feed everything that follows. The skills on the right side of this diagram — Rapid Threat Recognition, Facial Recognition, Behavioral Assessment, Situational Awareness, Pattern Recognition — are what this program builds. © John L. Demand 2007 all rights reserved

The Four Steps In Plain Language

Observe is simply taking in information. What are you seeing, hearing, sensing? As simple as that sounds, we have already talked about how your brain filters and predicts. Training observation means learning to actually look rather than just accepting what your brain hands you.

Orient is where you make sense of what you observed. This is where your experience, training, and knowledge all work together. The seasoned officer and the rookie see the same scene. They orient to it completely differently. That gap is what this training closes.

Decide is committing to a course of action. In a real situation you are deciding with incomplete information. The quality of that decision depends almost entirely on the quality of your Observe and Orient.

Act is what you do. And here is the truth about Act: in a genuine emergency, action comes from what your brain has already rehearsed. In the moment itself there is no time to think. There is only what you have already become.

Turning the Tables: this dynamic also works in reverse. Perceptual blindness is not only something to defend against — it can be used deliberately to stay ahead of an adversary's own OODA Loop. A raised voice, a sudden light, a shift in position, or simply directing someone's attention elsewhere can buy the fraction of a second you need to act first. It is an old tool, used everywhere from flash-bang entries to a well-timed distraction on a domestic call — and like any

tool that creates an opening, it should only be used with a sound backup plan in place if it doesn't work.

Staying Ahead of the Other Person's Loop

One of Boyd's central ideas was that in any conflict, the person who cycles through the OODA Loop faster than their opponent wins. While the adversary is still observing, you are already acting. While they are still orienting, you are three steps ahead.

This is not about being reckless. It is about having trained your observation and orientation so thoroughly that those steps happen quickly and accurately. Not impulsively — precisely. Speed without accuracy creates disaster. Accurate speed, built through deliberate training, creates the edge that keeps you alive.

THE TOTALITY OF CIRCUMSTANCES LIVES IN ORIENT

Everything on the right side of the OODA diagram — situational awareness, pattern recognition, behavioral assessment, frame of reference, facial recognition — those are all Orient-phase skills. They are what your brain assembles to make sense of what you just observed. A woman holding scissors at home is one thing. The same woman at a domestic disturbance call with a history of threatening her husband is something else entirely. Same object. Entirely different Orient. Entirely different decision.

MODULE 5**FACIAL RECOGNITION AND THE RTR TEMPLATE**

The Face You Think You Know

Here is a test. Picture someone you love. Your spouse, a parent, a close friend. Someone whose face you have looked at hundreds of times. Now describe that face specifically. What is the exact shape of the jaw? Where do the ears sit relative to the eyes? What is the distance between the nose and the upper lip? What color exactly are the eyes?

Most people cannot do this. Not because they do not know the person. Because knowing someone and truly seeing their face are two completely different things.

I discovered this the hard way, and the numbers I found changed everything.

What the Testing Revealed

I was running sessions with trained police officers — professionals whose job required them every single day to observe and identify people. I would show a photograph of a face for about five seconds, put it away, and ask them to describe what they had seen.

The results were humbling. Officers could give me general information: male or female, approximate age, hair color. But the specific identifying details that would actually distinguish one person from another in a crowd? Gone almost immediately.

I pushed further. I showed one photograph, then presented a four-person array — one was the same person in a different pose, three were look-alikes. Which one matches?

The accuracy rate hovered between 40 and 50 percent. In some sessions it dropped below 20. Random chance with four options gives you 25 percent. Some of these trained officers were barely beating a coin flip.

I expanded the testing to civilians. Teachers. Accountants. Tradespeople. More than a hundred individuals. The results were nearly identical.

This is not a law enforcement problem. This is a human problem.

The Two Groups Who Could Do It

Two groups performed dramatically better than everyone else. Professional artists scored between 90 and 100 percent. Hairdressers, portrait photographers, and makeup artists scored substantially higher than the general population.

What did they all have in common? They spent their professional lives deliberately studying the specific geometric structure of human faces. Not glancing. Not recognizing. Actually looking — at the shape, the proportions, the spatial relationships that distinguish one face from another.

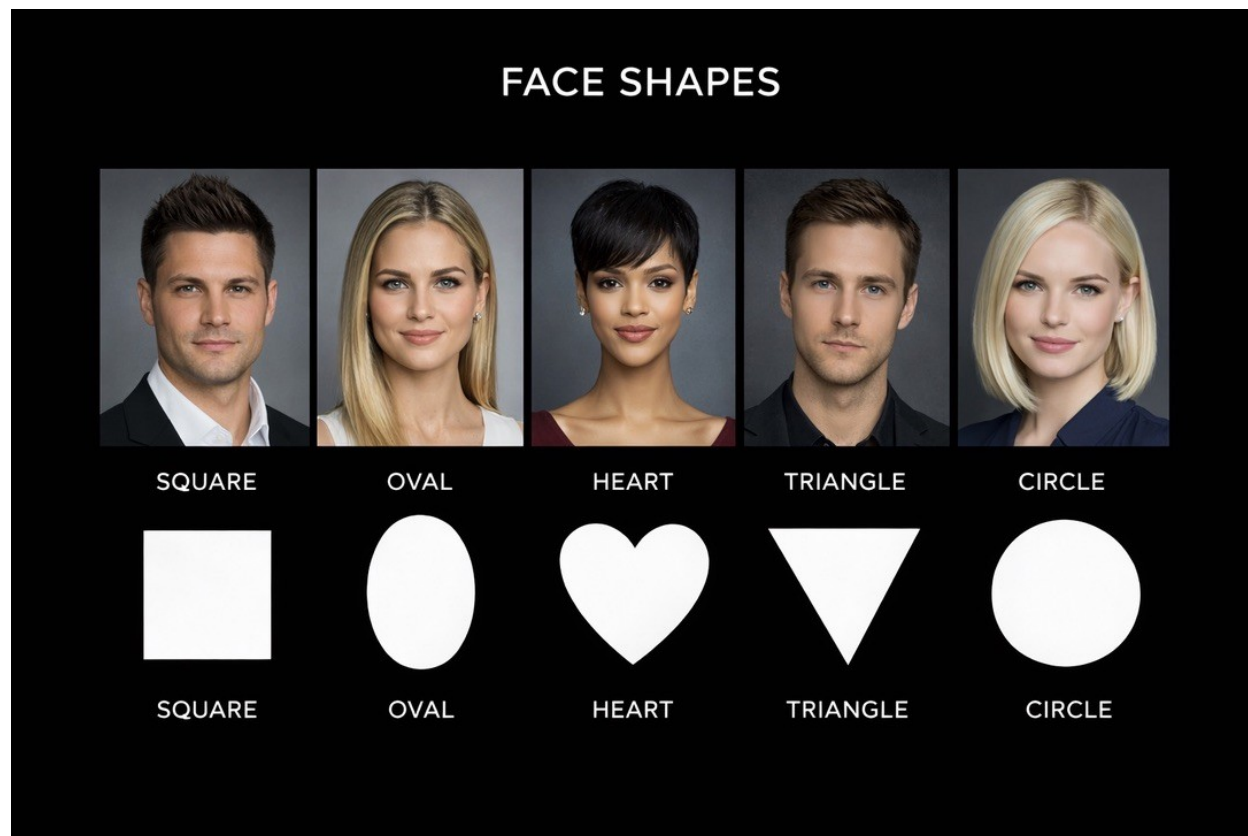
Facial recognition under operational conditions is a trainable skill. Skill level is not fixed. It reflects the quality and consistency of practice.

Non-Threatening / Ambiguous / Threatening: The same individual at three stages. Your ability to read the difference — accurately, at speed — is what this training builds.

Sharon Blanchard and the Tracing Exercise

I reached out to Sharon Blanchard, a forensic artist with an exceptional track record. She had produced accurate suspect drawings from survivor descriptions alone — no photographs, only words from a traumatized person. I saw one of her drawings next to the actual mug shot of the man who had abducted the survivor. The resemblance was not approximate. It was striking.

Sharon explained that she always starts with the overall shape of the face before touching any individual feature. She identified five basic shapes: oval, round, square, heart, and oblong. Facial shape is structurally stable — it does not change with expression or age the way features do. It is the foundation. From there she divides the face into thirds: forehead to brow, brow to nose tip, nose tip to chin. That framework places every feature accurately in relation to everything else.



I could not teach police officers to draw. But the concept underneath what she was describing — breaking a face into a structured framework rather than trying to absorb it as a whole — was absolutely teachable.

Here is what I came up with: I gave participants an 8x10 black and white photograph and asked them to trace it. Not draw it. Trace it.

Drawing requires artistic ability most people do not have. Tracing requires only attention. When you follow the actual outline of a jaw with a pencil, you are forced to see where it actually curves, not where you assumed it curves. You cannot trace what you have not seen. The act of tracing forces real observation.

The improvement in face recall scores after just five minutes of tracing was immediate and consistent across every cohort I tested.

We can't do it on this on-line course but if you want to further improve your facial recognition ability take a picture of wanted or missing person. Get a piece of tracing paper and with a number 2 pencil trace the face. You will be amazed at the improvement in your ability will be.

MODULE 6**READING EMOTIONS AND MICRO-EXPRESSIONS**

What the Face Reveals Before the Words Do

The Science Behind What Your Face Cannot Hide

In the 1960s, psychologist Dr. Paul Ekman began studying facial expressions in a way nobody had done systematically before. What he found was remarkable: a core set of human emotions — fear, anger, contempt, surprise, disgust, sadness, happiness — produce facial expressions that are universal across every culture on earth. You can show a photograph of fear to someone in the most remote village on the planet and they will identify it correctly. These expressions are not learned. They are hardwired.

More importantly: they cannot be fully controlled.

Even a person who is completely committed to showing nothing will produce a micro-expression — a flash of genuine emotion lasting between one-twentieth and one-fifth of a second before their controlled expression takes over. Most people never see these. They happen too fast and we are not trained to catch them.

With training, you can catch them. And what they tell you can save your life or someone else's.

Contempt: The One to Watch

Of all the micro-expressions, contempt deserves your special attention. It is the only asymmetrical expression in the human face — it appears on just one side, a slight tightening at the corner of the mouth, a nearly invisible sneer. And in research on targeted violence, contempt toward authority figures has been identified consistently as one of the most significant pre-attack indicators.

Someone who is angry can often be de-escalated. Someone who is afraid can be reassured. But someone who genuinely holds you in contempt has already placed themselves above you in their own mind. They are not afraid of the consequences. That is a different kind of problem, and it requires a different level of awareness.

The Case That Almost Became a Tragedy

When I was Director of Security, we had a termination situation. The employee had been through a long disciplinary process. Everything about the termination looked controlled — HR present, paperwork signed, the individual calm throughout. He left the building without incident.

But something had registered with me that I could not dismiss.

In the moment when the final decision was communicated to him — that his employment was over — there was a fraction of a second when he looked at the HR manager and then at me. What I saw in that fraction of a second was not anger, not shock, not grief. It was contempt. Pure, cold, dismissive contempt. The kind of look that says: this is not over, and you do not understand what is coming.

His face composed itself almost immediately. He nodded. He signed. He left.

But I could not shake what I had seen. I escalated my concern and recommended a thorough follow-up investigation — his workspace, his computer, his communications.

What that investigation found confirmed everything. He had made specific statements and taken preparatory steps toward returning to that facility to cause serious harm to specific individuals. Early intervention prevented what would have been a catastrophic outcome.

Nobody was hurt. But it was very close.

RECOGNITION, NOT PROOF

That outcome was not the result of a camera, a report, a tip line, or any technology. It was the result of one fraction-of-a-second expression that most people would have missed entirely — and a decision to take it seriously rather than dismiss it as a feeling. That is what micro-expression training is for.

Building Your Baseline

To read emotion accurately, you need to know what normal looks like for the person in front of you before you can identify what abnormal looks like. This is why the opening moments of any contact matter. Before commands, before explanations — take thirty seconds to observe. What is their natural posture? What does their resting expression look like? What is their normal rate of movement?

Once you have that baseline, deviation becomes visible. And deviation is where the information lives.

I want to say something here that I believe deeply: reading micro-expressions and behavioral cues is not about treating every person you encounter as a suspect. Most of the people you will interact with in your career are not threats. They are people — often scared, sometimes confused, occasionally angry for entirely legitimate reasons. The skill of reading a face is also the skill of recognizing when someone is terrified through no fault of their own. When they need help rather than enforcement. When they are in crisis and do not know how to ask for it.

MODULE 7**BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT AND PRE-ASSAULT INDICATORS****The Signals That Come Before the Violence**

Violence rarely arrives without announcement. That is one of the most important things I learned in thirty years of police and security work, and it is something that research confirms consistently. Critical events begin with behavior. They progress from normal to unusual to critical. The window between the first real signal and the act of violence is almost always longer than people assume.

The problem is not that the signals are not there. The problem is that we are not trained to see them.

What the Body Does Before the Mind Decides

When a person is preparing to act violently, their body begins to prepare whether or not they are consciously aware of it. Adrenaline starts flooding the system. Respiration changes. The hands may drift toward a concealed weapon — not a draw, just a brief touch, an unconscious check that it is still there. The eyes may narrow onto a target. The body may begin to blade — rotating to protect the weapon side from your view.

These are involuntary or semi-voluntary behaviors. The person doing them often does not realize they are doing them. That is exactly what makes them valuable as indicators. They cannot easily be controlled, and they appear before the action they precede.

According to FBI research on officer fatalities and assaults, most offenders carry in the waistband, the groin area, or the small of the back — not in a holster. Approximately 40 percent carry a secondary weapon. These carry positions produce specific behavioral patterns, particularly when the carrier's body position changes. Standing up from a seat. Exiting a vehicle. Beginning to run. A brief, self-conscious adjustment of the hand toward the carry position — less than a second — is a signal. A shirt that hangs differently on one side is a signal. A person blading during a contact is a signal.

None of these alone is proof. All of them together, read in context, build a picture.



DRAW vs. PICK: The difference is in the grip angle, the finger position, and the movement trajectory. These distinctions are real and learnable. Train your eyes to see them. From behind: The same distinction from a different angle. Context, positioning, and movement all contribute to the assessment.

The Night I Saw the Hammer Come Back

Let me tell you about a call that I still think about today.

It came in as a domestic disturbance. A young man threatening his mother with a hatchet inside their townhouse. In the late 1960s there were no SWAT teams for situations like this. There were no specialized negotiators, no layered protocols. There was a patrol officer. There was an address. There was an expectation that you would go in and handle it. I was that officer.

I knocked. The mother answered, visibly shaken. Her son was upstairs in his bedroom, she said. He had threatened to kill her. I entered, made my way to the second floor, and drew my service weapon — a Smith and Wesson Model 29, .357 Magnum revolver. I announced myself. “Police!” The door flew open.

He was nineteen years old. What I knew in the fraction of a second after that door swung open was that he was holding a hatchet above his head and moving toward me without any hesitation whatsoever. I backed down the narrow hallway toward the bathroom door behind me. Nowhere to go. I ordered him to drop the weapon. He did not stop. He kept coming. He was within six feet of me. I raised my weapon, aimed at center mass, and began to squeeze the trigger.

With a double-action revolver, you can feel the mechanism working. The hammer draws back as you apply pressure to the trigger. There is a physical progression — a sequence of small mechanical events that leads to one large irreversible one. I could feel that progression happening. I was committed to firing.

And then, in the same instant — not before, not after, but simultaneously — something else entered my awareness. In my peripheral vision I could see another officer had come up behind the suspect. He was directly in my line of fire. I saw it in less time than it takes to describe it. I released the trigger. The hammer returned forward. I did not fire.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT MOMENT

I did not make a decision in the way we normally use that word. There was no deliberation, no weighing of options. There was recognition — immediate, complete, and actionable — followed by a physical response that happened faster than conscious thought. A trained pathway delivered information at the speed the situation required. A fraction of a second earlier or later and it would not have mattered either way.

The suspect brought the hatchet down. The blade struck the floor approximately one inch from my lead foot. I could feel the vibration through the floorboards.

What happened next is harder to describe with pride, though I have made my peace with it. The adrenaline had nowhere left to go. I moved forward and took him down. It took four officers to pull me off. I sat in the squad car for the better part of half an hour, shaking, unable to drive, as the adrenaline worked its way through my body.

He was charged with attempted murder. He was convicted. Because of his age and his drug addiction, he was sentenced to a rehabilitation facility for five years.

For weeks afterward I had nightmares. Not about the hatchet. Not about the physical struggle or the blade an inch from my foot. The nightmares were about what I had almost done — the round that almost fired, the officer who would have been hit, and what that would have meant. My brain rehearsed that outcome in the specific detail that nightmares reserve for the things we most need to process.

There was no language for what I was going through at the time. Post-traumatic stress was not a concept that had entered the vocabulary of law enforcement in any meaningful way. You were expected to handle what you encountered, file your report, and return to duty. I carried it alone, the way officers of that era carried most things.

But it left something behind. A permanent, bone-deep understanding of how close the margins are. Of how much depends on what you recognize and when.

What This Means for Your Training

That call would be handled very differently today. A barricaded subject with a weapon triggers a perimeter, a SWAT response, trained negotiators. Those protocols save lives and I am glad they exist.

And yet even within those improved protocols, the fundamental requirement never changes. At some point a human being has to read a situation in real time and act on what they see. The perimeter can be set, the negotiator can be deployed, the tactical team can be positioned — and still, at the critical moment, it comes down to one person reading what is in front of them.

Train for that moment. Build the pathways. Because when it comes — and for many of you reading this, it will — there will be no time to do anything except be what you have already trained yourself to be.

MODULE 8

TOTALITY OF CIRCUMSTANCES

It's Never Just One Thing

Here is a scenario. You are responding to a suspicious person call outside a school. When you arrive, you see a man standing near the fence line. Heavy jacket on a warm day. Hands in his pockets. Eyes moving toward the entrance. Is that a threat? The answer is: not yet. You do not know.

People wear jackets on warm days. People look at buildings. People put their hands in their pockets. Any one of those observations in isolation means almost nothing. But in combination — in context, given the call that brought you there, given what you know about the environment — the picture starts to mean something.

That is the totality of circumstances. It is the most important thinking discipline in this entire field.

How All the Pieces Connect

Every module in this course feeds into this one. The OODA Loop gives you the framework. Flash recognition gives you the speed to take in data before it is gone. Facial recognition and micro-expressions give you information about what the person is feeling and trying to conceal. Behavioral assessment gives you signals about what they intend to do. Pattern recognition tells you whether what you are seeing fits the environment or does not fit.

None of those things by themselves make a decision for you. Together, they build a picture. And the picture is what you act on.



Non-threatening: Woman cutting fabric in her own kitchen.



Threatening: Same woman. Domestic disturbance call. Known history of threatening her husband. Same scissors — entirely different totality.

The woman with scissors in her kitchen is not a threat. The same woman with scissors at a domestic disturbance call — where you know she has previously threatened her husband with a

blade, where her expression as you enter is calculating rather than frightened, where she is holding those scissors in a way that tells you she has thought about what she might do with them that is a completely different picture. Same object. Entirely different totality. Entirely different decision.

The Tempo of Events

Situations develop. They accelerate. New information arrives continuously and each new piece changes the picture.

The OODA Loop must keep running. You do not observe once and stop updating. You observe, orient, decide, act — and then you observe again, because the situation changed while you were acting. A subject who had his hands up may have lowered them. A crowd that seemed calm may have shifted. A person who appeared compliant may be watching for the moment your attention breaks.

The ability to process all of that continuously — to update your picture in real time without freezing — is the most demanding skill in this program. It is also the one most likely to determine whether you and the people around you go home.

Cooper's Color Codes: Your Awareness Dial

Colonel Jeff Cooper developed a color-coded system for describing an individual's state of situational awareness. It remains one of the most practical frameworks in law enforcement training because it gives officers a common language for a mental state that is otherwise difficult to describe.

Code White is switched off. You are unaware, distracted, and dependent on an attacker's incompetence for your survival. Most civilian violence happens to people in Code White.

Code Yellow is relaxed alertness — no specific threat identified, but general awareness maintained. Eyes moving. Peripheral system active. In Yellow, it is genuinely difficult for someone to surprise you. This is where every officer should live while on duty.

Code Orange is when something specific has activated your attention. You have identified something that needs evaluation. This is also the last point at which de-escalation, repositioning, or disengagement remains most available. Orange is where you formulate the plan.

Code Red is the decision to act. The plan executes. This is not the moment for evaluation — evaluation happened in Orange.

The goal of this training is to make Yellow your automatic default. Not tense. Not switched off. Present. Continuously and calmly aware. That is not a mental attitude you decide to have. It is a habit you build through practice until the continuous low-level scan of your environment runs in the background the same way Lieutenant Gessler's did in that squad car — not as effort, just as the way you move through the world.

"What you notice when you don't have to notice is what saves you when you need it most."

Graham v. Connor: The Standard You Are Held To

For those of you in law enforcement, the totality of circumstances is not just a tactical concept — it is the legal standard. The Supreme Court's 1989 decision in *Graham v. Connor* established that the reasonableness of a use-of-force response is determined by what a reasonable officer would have perceived and concluded given the totality of the circumstances known at the time.

Not what turned out to be true. Not what a review board figured out afterward in a well-lit room with all the time in the world. What was reasonably perceivable in the moment.

That places the entire weight of justified force on the quality of your observation and your ability to correctly read and articulate what you were seeing. This training is not just about staying safe. It is about being able to do your job in a way that is both effective and defensible.

A Final Word

I built this program because I did not want another officer to stand next to a stolen vehicle and not see it. I did not want another family to lose someone because a trained professional did not have tools they should have been given from the first day of their career.

This is not a criticism of law enforcement or security professionals. It is an acknowledgment that we have expected people to perform a skill we never properly trained. We handed officers a badge and trusted that observation would develop on its own. Some people developed it through experience and mentors and luck. Many did not — and paid for it.

You deserved this training from the beginning of your career.

This is where it starts

Ask yourself Gessler's two questions.

At every scene. Every contact. Every environment you walk into.

What do you see? What doesn't fit?

MODULE 9

BEYOND VISION

What the Other Senses Know

This entire program has been built around vision. The exercises are visual. The language we use — see, observe, recognize — is visual. And that emphasis is correct, because vision is the dominant sense and the primary channel through which threat information reaches the brain in most situations.

But some of the most experienced and effective officers I have ever known were not operating on vision alone. They were operating on the full sensory system. And they had learned, through years of practice and attention, to trust every channel of it.

The Smell of a Scene

Smell is the oldest sense in evolutionary terms. It has a direct neural pathway to the limbic system — the part of the brain that processes emotion and survival response — that bypasses the cortical processing that vision and hearing go through. When you smell something, the information reaches your threat-assessment system faster and more directly than almost any visual input.

The chemical smell of a meth lab. The copper-iron smell of blood in a quantity that means something serious has happened. The specific quality of decomposition. The smell of burning that is different from a fireplace — accelerant, wiring, something that should not be burning.

Two odors deserve specific attention because their consequences can be immediate and severe.

Mercaptan is the sulfur-based chemical added to natural gas specifically so people can detect it. Natural gas is odorless on its own. Mercaptan gives it the rotten-egg smell that functions as a survival alert. I encountered this firsthand while conducting a security survey for the CEO of the corporation I worked for, who had just purchased a beautiful estate in California. I smelled mercaptan — faintly, but unmistakably. I told the CEO we needed to call the gas company. When they arrived, they found a significant leak. Had it not been detected when it was, the accumulation could have caused an explosion. Know this smell. It saves lives.

Chlorine gas carries the sharp, bleach-like odor you recognize from swimming pools — but at dangerous concentrations it is toxic and potentially fatal. A strong chlorine smell in an environment where it does not belong is a serious warning signal that demands immediate action.

These are not vague impressions. They are specific chemical signatures that can be learned. You build olfactory templates the same way you build visual ones. Pay attention to what you smell when you enter scenes. Connect it to what the scene turns out to be. Over time the library builds.

What You Hear That You Are Not Listening For

Sound provides information that vision cannot. It operates around corners, through walls, across distances where the visual field cannot reach. Most officers have been trained to listen for the obvious — shots fired, screaming, breaking glass. The less obvious is where the real intelligence lives.

The quality of silence in a space that should not be silent. A crowd whose ambient noise pattern changes — not louder, but different. Muffled sounds where none should be. Crying that is being

suppressed rather than expressed. Voices at a pitch or volume that does not match the stated situation.

And then there is voice itself — not just as a sound to hear, but as a signature to read. Accents identify origin and can connect a person to a location, a community, or a prior event. Pitch and register carry emotional state. The voice that goes flat and controlled in a situation that should produce agitation is telling you something the words are not.

The Voice That Solved the Case

One morning our dispatch relayed a home invasion at a local residence. My partner and I responded to the scene where we found an elderly couple tied up with ropes in their bed. During our investigation we asked them whether any service work had been done at the home over the past several months. They told us they had landscapers and air conditioning work done.

Our department had just installed a ten-channel recorder that captured all incoming phone calls. Someone had called in after the crime. The voice on the tape said: “I tink you better go to 1120 Central Road. There are a couple of peoples tied up in their bed.”

I listened to the call. I noted the accent — a specific pattern of speech that was not generic, not anonymous. It was a broken Chicago accent with particular characteristics that were distinctive enough to recognize.

I began contacting the services the couple had mentioned. When the owner of the air conditioning company answered the phone, I almost fell off my chair. The voice was the same. The same broken accent. The same rhythm. The same specific characteristics I had been listening for.

A few weeks earlier I had read about a new technology called voice identification. I contacted the professor who had written the article, at Michigan State University. He advised me to reach out to Lieutenant Ernie Nash of the Michigan State Police, who had the equipment to do voice print comparisons.

Lieutenant Nash asked me to bring the recording of the initial call and to obtain a separate recording of the suspect. I called the owner of the AC company and through a carefully structured conversation I got him to say nearly every word that appeared on the original call. We drove to East Lansing. Lieutenant Nash compared the two recordings. His conclusion: they were the same person. He volunteered to testify as to the accuracy of the comparison.

This was the first case of voice print identification in the state of Illinois. It was the only evidence we had. We made the arrest. We filed the charges. But the judge ruled that further evidence would be required to proceed. Without DNA — which did not yet exist as an investigative tool — and without fingerprints or identification, we could not take it further. I knew we had the right man.

I tell this story not as a frustration but as a proof. An elderly couple tied in their bed. A tip call with a distinctive accent. A new technology I had happened to read about in a journal. And a voice that gave itself away the moment it answered the phone.

The voice on that tape was distinctive enough to recognize. I had built a template in forty-five seconds of listening. That template identified a suspect. Voice print identification has since become a recognized and widely used forensic tool in law enforcement investigations worldwide.

Touch and Proximity

Stand close enough to someone who is about to fight and your body knows it before your visual assessment is complete. The micro-tensions in a body preparing for violence have a physical quality that registers on your own nervous system through channels that are not fully understood but are reliably reported by trained professionals.

Your skin is also a threat detection system. The hair standing on the back of the neck is not metaphor. It is a vestigial survival response — the body's piloerection system activating in response to threat signals that may not have fully reached conscious awareness yet. When you feel that, you do not need to identify what triggered it before you respond to it.

Trust What You Cannot Name

Every experienced officer who has survived a serious encounter has a version of this story: something I cannot explain made me slow down. Something I cannot name made me change positions. That something is the full sensory system doing what it was trained to do.

The training builds the library. The library enables the recognition. But the recognition does not always come with a label attached. Sometimes it comes as a feeling, a sense, a signal that the body delivers before the brain has finished constructing its sentence.

Write down whatever comes to you in the exercises even when you cannot explain where it came from. Act on the signal from the back of your neck even when your conscious mind is still catching up. The training gives you the foundation. The full sensory system does the rest.

Integrating the Full Sensory Picture

When you arrive at a scene, before you direct your full visual attention to the primary subject, take one deliberate moment — a breath's worth of time — and receive the scene through all channels simultaneously. What do you smell? What do you hear? What does the air in this space feel like? What is your body telling you before your eyes have finished their assessment?

This is not a slow-down. It is a two-second expansion of your sensory intake before the focused processing begins. Two seconds that may deliver information that focused visual attention would have filtered.

Then proceed with the visual assessment, the behavioral reading, the totality of circumstances analysis. But carry the initial multi-sensory impression with you. If something registered in those two seconds — a smell, a sound, a physical signal — it belongs in your assessment.

"The spidey sense is not magic. It is the brain completing a recognition process that never reached conscious awareness. The answer arrived before the question was fully formed. This is trainable."

DISCLAIMER

While Observation On Demand, LLC, John L. Demand, Jr. and any of its associates strive to make the information in this program as timely and accurate as possible, the company and author make no claims, promises, or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the contents of this program, and expressly disclaim liability for errors and omissions in the program. No warranty of any kind, implied, expressed, or statutory, including but not limited to the warranties of non-infringement of third party rights, title, or fitness for a particular purpose, is given with respect to the contents of this program or the results of this training.

Rapid Threat Recognition is a methodology to help train individuals to see images at greater speeds. Much like a physical workout, every individual is unique, and results of any training program vary. Observation On Demand, LLC, hereafter referred to as O2D, John L. Demand, Jr., and any associates of O2D make no guarantees as to the results of Rapid Threat Recognition training. We have based the training on the latest findings in brain research and the discovery of brain plasticity, but individual skill levels prior to and following training are influenced by an extreme number of individual variables — e.g., eyesight, age, medical history, prior experience, genetics, etc. — such that results cannot be implied or guaranteed.

It is extremely important to note that Rapid Threat Recognition and observation are only a piece in the totality of circumstances of every situation. The purpose of the program is to increase the ability to recognize visual cues and to do so more rapidly, but it is by no means the definitive cause and effect for critical decision making. Context, situational awareness, pattern recognition, and individual skill levels — both mental and motor — play a significant role in the judgment of any situation and must be taken into account during critical decision making.

ALL SITUATIONAL JUDGMENTS MUST INCLUDE THE TOTALITY OF CIRCUMSTANCES

MODULE 10 THE EXERCISES

Before You Begin

The exercises are the core of this program. Everything in the eight modules you have just read was building toward this. The science, the stories, the framework — it all exists to give you a foundation so that when you sit down at a device and begin training, you understand what your brain is doing and why it matters.

Read the full manual before beginning any exercise. Then start with Exercise 1 and work through in sequence. Do not skip ahead because a level seems easy. The foundation you build in the early exercises is what makes the later ones possible.

One practical note on the training protocol: follow Dr. Michael Merzenich's research-supported approach. Three days of active flash exercise sessions, followed by two days of rest. On rest days, passive observation practice — the driving drill described in Module 2, the face-shape exercise from Module 5 — is appropriate and beneficial. Active flash sessions and everyday street observation are different things. Both matter. Do not confuse them.



John L. Demand Jr. with Dr. Michael Merzenich at Dr. Merzenich's home in San Francisco — the day whose conversation confirmed everything RTR had been built on.

Target 80 percent accuracy before advancing to the next level on timed exercises. On exercises marked as requiring 100 percent accuracy — Pick and Draw and Blue on Blue specifically — that standard is not negotiable. In the field, those exercises have no margin for error.

The Exercise Library

Introductory Exercise — 6-Digit Progressive

Before you begin the formal exercise sequence, try this one. Six-digit numbers will flash on your screen, starting at one full second and stepping down through half a second, a quarter second, and one-tenth of a second. There are no scores recorded here. The purpose is simply to experience the progression — to feel what your brain can do at each speed and to understand, from the inside, what you are training toward. Most people have a moment during this exercise where something clicks. That moment is the starting point. Find it, then begin the program.

Target: 80% object accuracy before advancing to the next speed level.

Exercise 1 — Six Digits, 1.0 second, .05 second, 0.25 seconds, .01 second

A six-digit number flashes on the screen for one full second. Your task is to write down exactly what you saw. Twenty sets, recorded and scored. This is your baseline. Use it to establish clean habits: absorb the number as one complete image rather than reading it left to right one character at a time. That shift in how you take in information is the fundamental skill this entire program develops. When you are proficient 80% at a level move to the next. This is the first critical exercise that will develop your brain to see faster images. As a side benefit it should help you with reading and chunking other images.

Exercise 2 — License Plates

The same progressive speed structure — 1.0, 0.5, 0.25, and 0.1 second — applied to license plates. Seven characters, mixed letters and numbers, variable state formats. A vehicle of interest passing at a combined closing speed of 70 miles per hour gives you less than two seconds for the full plate. This exercise trains exactly that situation. The cognitive skills built in Exercises 1 through 4 transfer directly here.

Target: 80% at each speed level before advancing.

Exercise 3— Double Decision

A firearm — either a semi-automatic pistol or a revolver — appears in the center of the screen. Surrounding it in an outer ring are a series of boxed images. All but one are hose nozzles. Your task is to identify which box contains the matching firearm. The hose nozzle was selected deliberately: it was actually mistaken for a pistol in a real use-of-force incident. This exercise trains rapid discrimination between objects that share a general shape but differ in critical detail, while also requiring split attention between a central reference and a peripheral array.

Exercise 4— Blue on Blue

This exercise addresses one of the most serious risks in active threat response: the failure to rapidly identify a plainclothes officer as law enforcement. Credentials may be displayed on a belt, on a neck chain, or carried in the hand. In the fraction of a second available during a dynamic event, the ability to distinguish credentials from other objects is critical. This exercise requires 100 percent accuracy. There is no acceptable margin of error.

Required standard: 100% accuracy.

Exercise 5 — Pick and Draw

This is the most important exercise in the program. The distinction between a person reaching into a pocket or waistband to retrieve an object and a person drawing a weapon is real, consistent, and learnable. The grip angle changes. The finger position changes. The arc of movement is different. These differences appear before the weapon clears the carry position — which means recognition is possible before the threat is fully presented. That recognition gap is the margin between response and reaction. Study the hand mechanics carefully before beginning the timed portion. Know the difference before you try to recognize it at speed.

Required standard: 100% accuracy.

Exercise 6— Circular Threat Assessment

You are at the center. Multiple individuals surround you. Exactly one of them is holding a weapon. Your task is to identify the threat before the flash ends. This exercise follows directly from Pick and Draw — it applies the weapon recognition skill under environmental pressure, with multiple subjects competing for your attention simultaneously. Flash duration starts at 1.0 second and progresses to 0.1 second. Peripheral vision, trained pattern recognition, and the ability to resist fixating on the wrong subject are all in play.

Exercise 7 — Target Acquisition

Two targets appear simultaneously — one on the left, one on the right. Each displays a set of digits at center mass. Your task is to record both sets accurately. Flash duration is self-selected, allowing you to advance at your own pace. At higher speeds, both numbers cannot be read sequentially — your peripheral vision must handle one target while central focus handles the other. This exercise directly trains the split-attention and peripheral processing skills that apply to any multi-subject scene.

Exercise 8 — Facial Expressions

Begin in study mode. The seven universal expressions — fear, anger, contempt, surprise, disgust, sadness, happiness — are presented with descriptions and identifying markers. Learn them before the flash rounds begin. The exercise then presents expressions at progressively faster speeds: 1.0, 0.5, 0.25, and 0.1 second. Pay particular attention to contempt — the only asymmetrical expression in the human face, and the one most consistently associated with pre-attack indicators in targeted violence research. It will challenge you at speed. That is intentional.

Exercise 9 — Where's Perpo

A suspected perpetrator is displayed for five seconds. Study the face. The exercise then presents a series of crowd scenes. Your task is to identify the individual within the crowd. This exercise integrates everything the program has built — facial recognition, the structured observation framework from the RTR Template, and the ability to hold a clear mental image under the pressure of visual competition. It is the closest simulation in this program to a real-world surveillance or post-incident identification scenario.

Exercise 10 — Kim's Exercise

Kim's Exercise is one of the oldest and most effective observation training methods in existence. It takes its name from Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim*, in which a young intelligence operative is trained by his handler using a tray of objects — study them, cover them, recall them. The British military adopted the method for scout training. It belongs in this program for the same reason it has survived more than a century: it develops deliberate, structured visual encoding under time pressure, which is precisely what this program is built to produce.

The exercise works as follows. A grid of objects — varied in type, color, size, and placement — is displayed for a fixed period. The grid is removed. You record as many objects as you can, in as much detail as possible: not just what you saw, but where it was, what color, what condition, what relationship it had to the objects around it.

This is not a memory test. It is an observation test. The distinction matters. Memory retrieves what observation captured. If the observation was shallow, the memory will be shallow regardless of effort. The training targets the capture stage — the moment the eyes deliver information to the brain and the brain decides how much of it to process and retain.

Kim's Exercise builds what Lieutenant Gessler had in that squad car. Not a list of things he memorized. A habit of encoding everything, automatically, at depth — so that when something changed, his brain already had the baseline to measure it against.

A Final Note on the Exercises

Some of these exercises will feel impossible at first. Work through them anyway. Some you will find easier than you expected. Do not coast. The difficulty you feel at the edge of your capability is where the training is actually happening. Stay there as long as you can, rest when the protocol calls for it, and come back.

Lieutenant Gessler built his recognition through years of paying attention when he did not have to. This program gives you a structured path to build what he built — faster, more deliberately, and with a clear understanding of the science behind it. What you build here belongs to you. Take it onto the street with you. Use it every day.

There will be future updates to the program with new exercises. If you would like to suggest an exercise you think would be helpful please send a text in the comments section on the website.

RAPID THREAT RECOGNITION
TRAINING LOG

Record your scores after each session. Honest tracking reveals exactly where the next work needs to happen. | Page 1 of 5

DATE	EXERCISE	SCORE	LEVEL

RAPID THREAT RECOGNITION

TRAINING LOG

Record your scores after each session. Honest tracking reveals exactly where the next work needs to happen. | Page 2 of 5

DATE	EXERCISE	SCORE	LEVEL

RAPID THREAT RECOGNITION TRAINING LOG

Record your scores after each session. Honest tracking reveals exactly where the next work needs to happen. | Page 4 of 5

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RAPID THREAT RECOGNITION

TRAINING LOG

Record your scores after each session. Honest tracking reveals exactly where the next work needs to happen. | Page 5 of 5

DATE	EXERCISE	SCORE	LEVEL

Your score is not who you are. It is where you are starting. Every session builds the pathway. Come back to earlier levels after you complete advanced ones — you will find they have gotten easier. That improvement is real and it belongs to you.

In Omni Paratus — Semper Observari

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WITH GRATITUDE

Dr. Roger Depue

Founder of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, whose question — “What is the bridge to the next thing?” — shaped this program more than any other single input. A genuine friend and the standard by which I measure professional integrity.

Dr. Mark Rogers

Offered significant psychological help in the original live Rapid Thread Recognition program

Dr. Michael Merzenich

Professor Emeritus at the University of California San Francisco, whose research on brain plasticity gave scientific foundation to what I had been building by intuition and practical observation for years. His generosity with his time and his mind changed the direction of this work.

Sharon Blanchard

Whose systematic approach to facial observation methodology became the foundation of the O2D recognition template. Her willingness to share her expertise opened a door I had been looking for.

Lieutenant Fred Leland

Whose support and professional partnership has sustained this work through every difficulty.

Stephen Cliffe

Whose article “Training the Whole Circle” represents one of the clearest integrations of Boyd's OODA framework and Cooper's Color Code system in the training literature.

The Officers, Military Personnel, and Security Professionals

The hundreds of men and women who sat in training sessions over the years, challenged the program, improved it with their feedback, and demonstrated through their results that this work produces what it promises. This program exists because of them.

And to the officer whose name I never learned, who walked into a house in a Chicago suburb on a cold February night in 1956 and said four words. He did not know that a nine-year-old boy was watching from the doorway. He did not know what he set in motion that night.

He was simply doing his job. Seeing clearly when others could not. Acting on what he recognized. That is enough. That is everything.

God bless each and every one of you. Thank you for your service.

In Omni Paratus — Semper Observari

Ready for anything. Always observant