

Get into the habit of breaking out of tunnel vision by scanning your 360 degree environment.

Even with the reliable Smith & Wesson Model 386 Night Guard .357 Magnum, tunnel vision must be broken.



BREAKING OUT OF TUNNEL VISION

[BY BRUCE N. EIMER, Ph.D.]

Because we are human, we have a limited attentional capacity or focus of attention.

Our conscious mind can only attend to a finite amount of information at one time, even though our unconscious mind can subliminally process many things simultaneously. As we become old geezers, for most of us, our attentional capacity tends to become even more limited in scope. Without training and practice, it becomes harder to focus on more than one thing at a time.

When a presenting problem is markedly threatening, the limitations on our attentional capacity are compounded. In such circumstances, we tend to exclusively focus on the most compelling or salient aspects of the problem to the exclusion of other aspects, unless we have trained to do otherwise. Conscious effort is required to break out

of such *tunnel vision*, and this is what must be done to solve most problems. With training, *conscious competence* in breaking out of tunnel vision turns into *unconscious competence*. In fact, that is the definition of a good habit.

TUNNEL VISION

Tunnel vision is a common phenomenon, and it gets worse as we get older. Therefore, we must continually train to broaden our focus of attention so that we can observe the big picture in problematic situations. Unless we see the big picture, we miss seeing other important aspects of the situation that must be considered in order to solve the problem.

What follows are two examples of this tunnel vision phenomenon. The first example describes a small, not at

all life-threatening, but unfortunately common problem in the world of firearms: *gun shop rudeness*. Women and the elderly often find themselves to be the object of such offensive behavior. It happened to me recently and the solution required breaking out of tunnel vision. The second example has to do with training to protect oneself if confronted by a big, life threatening problem: *a deadly assault*. Once again, women and the elderly are more at risk, and the solution requires training to break out of tunnel vision in this type of life or death situation.

EXAMPLE ONE – GUN SHOP RUDENESS

Recently, I was evaluating a pre-owned semi-automatic pistol for pur-



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chase at a gun shop where I have been a repeat customer. As I manipulated the pistol, cycled its action, and dry fired it with the shop owner's permission, one of the shop's regular salesmen started making loud comments about how the "snapping" and "clicking" was driving him crazy, and how I dry fired guns at the shop more than any other customer. Several other customers who overheard his comments began laughing uncomfortably. I was offended by the salesman's rudeness and ignorance, but I remained polite. I proceeded to educate him that most modern center-fire pistols, including the one I was holding, were not damaged by dry firing, and that dry firing a defensive pistol was good practice. Unsurprisingly, the salesman was not convinced, and he

seemed like he could barely control his testosterone-fueled anger.

The narrow picture was that I initially had wanted to buy the gun, but now I was being treated rather shabbily by this salesman. Tunnel vision could have led me either to pursue an altercation with the sales clerk, or to purchase the handgun despite the unprofessional and impolite way I was being treated. Tunnel vision had to be broken!

The broader picture was that this salesman clearly did not have a clue about more than a few things, and I was a repeat customer and a fairly good one at that. Furthermore, one of the shop owners had overheard his comments and chose to remain silent and uninvolved. With some conscious effort, I refrained from engaging in any further

dialogue. I put the pistol down, and I walked out of the shop. I doubt that I will be back to that shop.

The broader picture here also includes the fact that I am not the only customer who has encountered macho, ignorant, gun shop sales personnel. Unfortunately, people who are new to firearms often encounter such clerks and ask them for advice on what type of gun to buy! Frequently, people new to the gun world register a misguided impression of gun people from such encounters. This is unfortunate, but it does not have to be the case. Newbies should arrange to go to a gun shop with a trusted and experienced person who can advise them, and make sure that they are not misled into purchasing the wrong gun for them, or subject to stu-

pid sales people. This could also help those who are new to guns to see the bigger picture, and prevent misleading gun shop myths and legends from being propagated.

Tunnel vision in this case would have resulted in my arguing with the offensive salesman or purchasing the gun anyway. In this case, breaking out of tunnel vision resulted in my giving the gun back to another salesman and walking out of the store. This was the better choice.

EXAMPLE TWO – A DEADLY ASSAULT

If you are threatened or assaulted by someone wielding a deadly weapon, all of your attention will naturally be drawn to the assailant like a magnet. This is an automatic and involuntary survival response and it creates tunnel vision and auditory exclusion. All that you tend to see and hear (and maybe smell) to the exclusion of anything else happening around you is the presenting threat, which often appears bigger and closer than he may in fact be. The big problem

is that often there is more than one bad guy, and the additional bad guys may be flanking you!

In order to survive such an encounter, it is necessary to break your tunnel vision by efficiently scanning your immediate 360 degree environment for additional threats, while keeping your eyes (and your gun if the situation warrants it) trained on the evident threat. This response runs counter to our natural and automatic response, which is to remain exclusively focused on the threat at hand. Therefore, we must train to scan whenever we practice defensive shooting so that, if the balloon goes up, we will do it automatically and correctly.

Train consistently. Consistent training is the only way to imprint a desirable reflexive and automatic response sequence. This is also called developing a new habit. Because we will almost certainly fight in the way we have trained, it is important to train properly. There is an old saying that “practice makes perfect.” This is not accurate. It is more realistic to say that “perfect practice makes perfect.” However, since no hu-

man can ever expect to be perfect, it is better stated that “correct practice makes correct performance.” In this case, “correct” means winning the fight, and you will not win the fight if you are outflanked!

SCANNING YOUR 360

The problem is two-fold. You must retain your gun, as the bad guys may try to take it away from you, and you must see all the bad guys, so you can deal with them appropriately. The solution is to incorporate proper scanning into your regimen whenever you train with a firearm. This should be practiced whenever you safely dry practice at home and whenever you shoot at the range. Get into the habit of breaking out of tunnel vision by scanning your 360 degree environment immediately after you fire one shot or a string of shots, before you reluctantly and carefully re-holster your gun with one hand, and without looking at your holster!

When you scan, keep your firearm pointed at the threat. Hold your gun tightly, and keep it close in to your

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body where it is hardest for someone to grab it away from you. Scan with your head and upper body. Do not swing the gun along with your body because (a) you may cover an innocent with your muzzle, (b) you need to keep it trained on the evident threat, and (c) if you swing with your gun, you may swing it into the waiting hands of a bad guy. Also, remember Cardinal Safety Rule Two: "Never point your muzzle at anything you are not willing to destroy." At the range, this cardinal rule translates into, "Always keep your muzzle pointed down range."

The scan sequence, keeping your eyes and your muzzle on the evident threat, and your gun tightly in close for retention purposes, would be to (1) smoothly and quickly scan to three o'clock and then refocus on the evident threat, (2) smoothly and quickly scan to nine o'clock and then refocus on the evident threat, (3) smoothly and quickly scan to six o'clock from your right side and then refocus on the threat, and (4) smoothly and quickly scan to six o'clock from your left side

and then refocus on the threat again.

Make sure to actually look for additional threats while you are scanning, so that you see them if they are there. This is not a perfunctory exercise in turning your head. Don't just look; *see!* Quickly bring your eyes back to the threat you have at gun point. This should take seconds. It is done intentionally, consciously, and not leisurely. The idea is to broaden your level of awareness and to break out of tunnel vision.

Building this sequence into our practice regimen is good for us old geezers. It gets us to move and twist. That may be the only physical exercise some of us get! It also builds physical flexibility which can be a lifesaver in a fight. Finally, it keeps us thinking. This builds mental flexibility. Tactical proficiency demands mental flexibility.

CONCLUSION

Start building good habits. Good habits are formed through consistent practice. Correct practice makes for correct performance. Build scanning your 360 into your training regimen in

order to practice broadening your range of awareness. When you scan, (a) keep the gun in close to your torso and hold it tight for retention purposes, and (b) do not just turn your head and look. *See!* This good habit may one day save your life. ■

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