



# **JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER**

## **DRILL OF THE MONTH**

Throughout 2026 we will be running a Drill of the Month in each edition of the newsletter. The goal is help motivate folks to get to the range and actually shoot their defensive weapons, and to have some fun in the process. Each month we'll post a drill or a short course of fire. You are encouraged to go to the range, shoot the drill, and then post your thoughts and a photo of your target on the Rangemaster Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rangemaster/> .

### **The Crucible**

Christopher Bean is a trainer and a Rangemaster certified instructor. Check him out at [tacticaladv.com/about-chris/](http://tacticaladv.com/about-chris/) .

Chris devised a ten shot drill that covers a concealed draw, a reload, different shot cadences, and spatial transitions, all in one quick drill. I love drills that interleave related skills and this is an excellent example.

You need two targets, side by side, at 5 yards. Chris has his own target, but a USPSA cardboard target will work as a substitute. On the target on the right, affix a 3"X5" card in the chest. The drill is shot as follows:

Start with gun holstered, concealed. On the beep, draw and fire 1 head shot to the left target then drop to the chest and fire 4 rounds. Reload (in battery or out of battery, your choice), then fire 5 rounds to the 3X5 card on the right target. Must get hits with all 10 rounds. Total time is your score. For a detailed explanation and the par times, see [tacticaladv.com/the-crucible](https://tacticaladv.com/the-crucible)

## The Decision Engine

Or

*“TacCon24, Tatiana, and the Birth of the Decision Engine”*

By Jim Shanahan

Jim is a USPSA Grand Master, an IDPA Master, and is a Rangemaster certified Professional Pistolcraft Instructor. Jim retired from the US Army, spent time as a government contract trainer, and is a full time trainer.

In 2024, at the Rangemaster Tactical Conference, I slipped into a class I hadn't registered for. Sometimes the best opportunities in training come from being in the right place at the right time, and this was exactly one of those moments.

Tatiana Whitlock was teaching a four-hour workshop called “Take-A- Seat”—a deep dive into fighting from seated positions and getting back up into the fight. I've been to

more classes than I can count, but this one stands out as one of the best I've ever taken.

It wasn't just the content. It wasn't the drills. It was a specific part of her post-engagement sequence.



She laid out four simple questions:

1. Who can help me?
2. Who can hurt me?
3. Where am I going?
4. Where are my people?

These were presented—at least to my understanding—as questions you can use during the post-engagement phase of a deadly force encounter. A kind of mental checklist to help you organize the world after you've fired shots and the immediate threat is down or gone.

And let me tell you—those four questions alone were worth the price of admission.

But then the voices in my head kicked in. First whispering among themselves, then whispering directly to me:

“These questions don’t just fit *after* the fight... they fit *everywhere*.”

And the more I thought about it, the clearer it became. Those four questions weren’t “post-engagement” questions—they were life questions. They were pre-threat, mid-threat, and post-threat. They worked in daily life. They worked in deadly force. They worked in normal errands. They worked while traveling. They worked while parking the car at Wal-Mart.

The questions weren’t just about evaluation—they were about *decision-making*.

And over the next couple of years, those four questions turned into what I now call my Decision Engine.

Below is the long version—the version I want to teach you, because this isn’t just a neat trick or cute mnemonic. This is the backbone of movement, awareness, and decision-making in every phase of a defensive encounter.

### Who Can Help Me?

This one seems simple at first, but it’s deeper than it looks.

“Who can help me?” could be:

- Your spouse
- A partner

- A coworker
- A nearby officer
- A stranger who isn't panicking
- Someone with a phone out and already dialing

And sometimes “help” isn't even about people.  
Sometimes “help” is:

- A wall
- A vehicle
- A corner
- A piece of cover
- An exit
- A choke point you can control
- A store employee who knows the layout better than you
- A door that locks

Help comes in a lot of forms.

And yes, this absolutely applies to deadly force encounters. But don't be surprised when I say it also applies to normal life. When everything is calm and peaceful, you're still constantly evaluating “Who or what around me improves my position if something goes wrong?”

Even in mundane interactions, this question keeps you oriented toward resources instead of tunnel vision.

This question makes you aware of assets.

### Who Can Hurt Me?

This one is often misunderstood as “Look for the bad guy.” Sure—that's part of it. But it's only part.

“Who can hurt me?” includes:

- The guy with the weapon
- The guy behind him
- The guy filming who may not like what he thinks he saw
- Angry family members of the threat
- Confused bystanders moving erratically
- Responding officers who don't know you're the good guy

It also includes the structural components of danger:

- Blind corners
- Elevations
- Tight aisles
- Unseen rooms
- Hidden angles

And—this is critical—it applies before the incident, not just after.

This is situational awareness.

This is travel safety.

This is understanding human behavior in unfamiliar environments.

“Who can hurt me?” keeps you honest about threat potential, environmental hazards, and your own blind spots.

Where Am I Going?

This is the question that hit me hardest.

Purposeful movement isn't optional. It matters in daily life, on the range, in a fight, and at the gas pump at midnight. Moving without purpose is wasted energy. Moving without a destination is just noise.

This question applies to everything from driving to Wal-Mart to navigating a crowd.

Think about how ridiculous it would be to get in your car without knowing where you want to go. You'd burn gas, waste time, and end up nowhere. Yet shooters do this in training all the time. They move without a plan. They "step off the X" because the instructor told them to—but they have no destination, no intent, and no outcome.

"Where am I going?" is about having direction.

It's the same as walking into a restaurant and immediately checking:

- Where's the door?
- Where's the bathroom?
- Where are the exits?
- What's the seating layout?

It's not paranoia. It's efficiency. It's being aware of your environment because being aware is better than being surprised.

This question anchors your movement. It gives it purpose. It shapes your route.

Where Are My People?

This one becomes more important the older I get.

For me, “my people” usually means my wife.  
My kids are grown. My team days are long behind me. But  
the responsibility doesn’t change.

“My people” can be:

- Your spouse
- Your kids
- Your parents
- Your friends
- Your partner
- A coworker you’re responsible for
- Or even a scared, lost child in the moment

It also includes innocents who aren’t “your people” but still  
fall under your moral responsibility.

This question matters at home.

It matters in crowds.

It matters overseas, where the language isn’t yours and the  
customs aren’t yours.

It matters in busy shopping areas where your group can get  
separated easily.

This is the question that keeps you from endangering  
people you care about—or people you have a moral  
obligation to protect.

This is geometry, accountability, and awareness, all rolled  
into one.

These Questions Apply Everywhere

These four questions are not limited to deadly force encounters.

They apply:

- Before the fight
- During the fight
- After the fight
- Long before any fight
- In normal daily life
- In transitional spaces
- In unfamiliar environments
- In travel
- In crowds
- In parking lots
- In restaurants
- In stores
- In airports
- In foreign countries

They are simple.

They are quick.

They force you to evaluate what matters right now.

And they tie directly into movement—the deliberate kind, not the choreographed kind.

These questions shape:

- Your awareness
- Your angles
- Your positioning
- Your decisions
- And ultimately your survivability

Once these questions get into your head, they become second nature. They run quietly in the background,

sharpening your judgment without taking up mental bandwidth.

This is the “Decision Engine”.

It connects everything—movement, awareness, angles, timing, and personal responsibility—into a clean, simple system you can use under stress.



## From Willingness to Effect

### *A Three-Part Examination of Cooper's Combat Triad*

Jeff Boren

Jeff is an educator, director of an armed security program for a school district, a Rangemaster certified Professional Pistolcraft Instructor, and a gifted trainer.

#### **PART I**

##### *Permission to Act*

By Jeff Boren

Every defensive encounter begins with a decision most people never consciously make.

*Not the draw.*

*Not the shot.*

*Not even the recognition of the threat.*

The first real action happens long before any of that. It is the internal permission to act. And if that permission has not already been granted, nothing else matters.

Tom Givens says it plainly: "We carry a gun because we might have to shoot someone." That statement resonates because it forces honesty. Carrying a firearm is not symbolic or theoretical. It is preparation for a specific, unpleasant possibility.

Jeff Cooper described this as lowering the threshold for violence. Not recklessness. Not aggression. A willingness to act decisively when action is required. That willingness is not created in the moment. It is a pre-made decision, declared long in advance.

Lance Thomas understood this. After surviving multiple violent encounters, he said, "I refuse to be a victim of violent crime." That decision was not formed when the door opened. It existed long before the first criminal ever walked into his store.

*That is mindset.*

## **Why We Freeze**

Human reactions to crisis are complex, but a pattern appears again and again. When violence forces the issue and we have no framework to work from, we freeze.

This is not weakness. It is not cowardice. It is a lack of prior structure.

When no decisions have been made in advance, the brain has nothing indexed. There are no mental files to pull from. As the late William Aprill described it, there are no "parking spaces." Without them, the mind stalls while trying to build meaning in real time.

That stall is what we often label as freeze.

Proper mindset prevents this not by making us faster, but by eliminating the need to decide from scratch under pressure.

## **Mindset Is a Progression**

Much of Cooper's work has been softened over time, particularly his color codes. Treated as simple awareness levels, they lose their original purpose.

Cooper was not teaching observation. He was teaching decision-making.

What he described was a progressive narrowing toward action. We notice a potential problem. We identify it. We confirm or dismiss it. All the while, we are lowering the threshold to respond appropriately if the situation demands it.

Mindset is not a switch. It is a controlled progression toward decisive action.

Where many of us stall is not in skill, but in acceptance.

## **The Gap Between Training and Reality**

We train hard. We measure performance. We chase improvement. That work matters.

But training without context creates a gap.

Violence is romanticized in popular culture. Misses rarely matter. Consequences are muted. Characters rise to the occasion regardless of preparation or cognitive overload. On the range, targets do not move. They do not think. They do not initiate the fight or continue to actively try to kill us.

This creates what I call, for lack of better term, the *Fallacy of Time*.

We unconsciously assume we will have more time than we actually will. We tolerate inefficiency at the beginning of the fight because static drills allow it. We rely on splits to make up for slow or inefficient presentations.

This type of training is necessary. But without the proper mindset framing it, it quietly reinforces false expectations.

### **Responsibility and Identity**

At some point, responsibility becomes individual.

There is a meaningful difference between a gun owner and an armed citizen.

The distinction is not equipment, credentials, or round count. It is how we think about violence and responsibility.

Some of us accept that violence exists and may come to us. Others assume it will not.

Refusing to acknowledge risk does not make it disappear. It only removes our ability to respond when chosen.

This is not victim blaming. It is reality.

### **Acceptance and Cost**

Acceptance is heavy. It is uncomfortable. It is not enjoyable to think about.

As humans, we often choose comfort over reality. Normalcy bias tells us that terrible things happen to other people.

At some point, we must answer an uncomfortable question honestly: Are we willing to take a life to stop a threat?

If the answer is no, that is a valid choice. But swearing off violence does not make violent crime disappear. It only limits how we can respond when confronted by it.

Acceptance carries a price. But preparedness carries a reward.

### **What Mindset Gives Us**

When the decision is made honestly and in advance, something changes.

We gain agency.

We build a mental framework that allows us to process before the moment, not during it. Training gains intent. Preparation gains direction. We accept our role in our own safety.

That acceptance does not create paranoia. It removes it.

There is a mindset lesson Tom teaches in the Rangemaster Instructor Development program that has always stood out to me, "If that man doesn't stop what he's doing, I may have to hurt him." It stands out to me because it is not fear. It is clarity.

However, intent alone is not enough.

Once the decision is made, the next question becomes unavoidable: can we execute when the moment arrives?

*That bridge is gun handling.*

## **PART II**

### *Tuning the Instrument*

By Jeff Boren

There is a moment most of us have seen at live events, though we may not have paid much attention to it.

A professional musician walks onto the stage, plays a brief note or chord, and makes a small adjustment. Sometimes it is an alternate tuning. Sometimes it is simply a final check. The movement is subtle. Almost invisible.

What matters is not the act itself, but what it represents. The performer is not learning in that moment. They are confirming that the instrument will respond exactly as expected when it matters.

That idea maps cleanly to combative shooting.

*Gun handling is our tuning.*

It is the work that happens before performance. The work that determines whether intent can become effect.

### **The Triad Is a Progression**

We have all seen Cooper's Combat Triad represented as three equal sides: mindset, gun handling, and marksmanship.

That depiction misses the point.

Cooper did not describe three parallel skills. He described a sequence we move through under stress:

*Mindset establishes willingness.*

*Gun handling enables action.*

*Marksmanship applies force to solve the problem.*

If mindset never resolves, nothing starts.

If gun handling breaks down, nothing works.

If marksmanship fails, nothing ends.

Gun handling lives in the middle because it is the bridge between intent and outcome.

### **Why the Middle Gets Ignored**

Gun handling is not exciting. It is repetitive. It is quiet. It does not photograph well and rarely generates praise.

We don't post videos of dry fire draws late at night. We don't celebrate the thousandth clean presentation from concealment or the countless grip confirmations that happen without an audience.

But this is the work that determines whether mindset ever reaches marksmanship.

When mechanics are underdeveloped, they consume attention. When mechanics are clean, they disappear.

That difference matters more than speed.

### **Gun Handling and Cognitive Bandwidth**

When gun handling is inefficient, it taxes our cognitive bandwidth. The draw requires thought. The grip requires

correction. Sight verification becomes effortful. Trigger press becomes deliberate rather than automatic.

The mind becomes occupied with operating the tool instead of solving the problem.

When gun handling is automated through deliberate practice, the equation changes. Mechanics run quietly in the background. Attention shifts outward. We can assess, decide, and respond as conditions change.

This is not about shooting faster. It is about thinking better.

### **The Cost of Skipping This Step**

Many shooters attempt to compensate for weak gun handling with marksmanship drills or time standards. They rely on split times to make up for inefficient presentations. They assume accuracy will solve problems that actually originate earlier in the sequence.

It rarely works.

We cannot out-marksmanship broken mechanics. Accuracy cannot exceed the quality of the process that delivers the shot.

Gun handling is not separate from marksmanship. It is what makes marksmanship possible under pressure.

### **Training With Intent**

Gun handling improves through repetition, but not mindless repetition. It requires intent.

Every draw, every grip, every presentation is an opportunity to reduce friction. To remove hesitation. To make the movement more reliable under stress.

This work is often done alone, with an empty gun and a timer. It isn't glamorous, but it is where capability is built.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is predictability.

### **Why This Matters**

We don't get the opportunity to fix mechanics once the fight begins.

By the time the decision to act has been made, the work in the middle must already be done. Gun handling can't be an afterthought. It must be reliable enough to disappear. It must be automated.

If we want a modern, high-performance civilian standard, one that respects Cooper's original intent, we must stop treating gun handling as something we rush through on the way to "real shooting."

The most important work happens before the first shot.

When the moment comes, there is no time left to tune.

### **Where the Sequence Leads**

*Mindset gives us permission.*

*Gun handling gives us capability.*

*Marksmanship gives us effect.*

Gun handling is the bridge that ensures the first can reach the last.

*And without it, the system collapses.*



## **PART III**

### *Marksmanship as Judgment*

By Jeff Boren

When most of us talk about marksmanship, we usually mean one thing: the ability to hit what we're aiming at.

That definition isn't wrong.

It's incomplete.

Hitting what we aim at is a mechanical outcome. In a real fight, marksmanship is something more demanding. It is the expression of every decision that came before the trigger press.

Accuracy alone does not solve problems.

### **What the Simple Definition Misses**

Marksmanship on a square range is linear: make the hit.

Marksmanship against a living, breathing, attacking human being is not. It carries consequence, uncertainty, and accountability. The target moves. The environment changes. The fight does not pause.

More importantly, marksmanship does not begin with the gun.

It begins with mindset. If the moral and psychological decision to act has not already been made, accuracy degrades before the pistol is even presented.

From there, it flows directly through gun handling. Efficient presentation, proper grip, sight management, trigger press, recoil control, and assessment do not occur in sequence. They occur together.

The triad functions as a system.

### **Marksmanship Begins with Accountability**

True marksmanship begins with a mental decision: the decision to press the trigger.

That decision carries weight. It accepts responsibility for what follows. Because of that, marksmanship cannot be reduced to hoping we hit what we want to hit.

When mindset is settled and gun handling is automated, marksmanship improves, not because we are trying harder, but because we have the mental bandwidth to think.

### **When Mechanics Steal Time**

When we are still consciously managing mechanics, delay appears between recognition and action.

That delay matters.

Automation doesn't make us reckless. It makes us available for decision-making. We are no longer fighting our bodies to perform tasks. We are free to assess and respond.

That is where accuracy improves.

### **Why Marksmanship Is Often Taught Alone**

Much of this comes from how firearms are taught.

Pedagogy builds shooters. It must. Sequenced learning is necessary.

But without progression to andragogical learning, those skills never integrate. Andragogy builds fighters. It is where context, judgment, and decision-making merge with mechanics.

That is where the triad fully exists.

### **Marksmanship as Application**

At the fighter level, marksmanship becomes conditional. It is no longer a fixed output, but a response to evolving information. That is what we mean when we say, “thinking with the gun.”

Without that transition, shooters either freeze or fire without purpose, sometimes too fast, sometimes too slow. Context determines cadence.

### **Evaluating Marksmanship Honestly**

As with most things, it depends.

Marksmanship must be evaluated by intent, context, and stage of development. There are times to isolate skills. There are times to integrate them.

The danger comes when marksmanship is treated as an endpoint.

There is no destination. Only a journey.

Technical skills are the easiest part. Mental skills require constant refinement. The destination, if it ever comes, is not proficiency. It is outcome.

### **Completing the Triad**

*Mindset answers if.*

*Gun handling answers whether.*

*Marksmanship answers how.*

Not as separate skills, but as one system.

Accuracy matters. Hits matter. Precision matters.

But marksmanship is not the foundation.

*It is the result.*

## **ANNUAL RANGEMASTER INSTRUCTOR CONFERENCE**

Once each year in December we conduct a two day conference for Rangemaster certified instructors. This has become almost a family reunion, allowing graduates from all over the US to socialize, network, and spend time among friends while sharpening and refreshing their shooting and teaching skills. The 2025 event was a huge success.

We gathered at Royal Range in Nashville, a fabulous facility. Massad Ayoub delivered a two hour lecture on legal issues, while our Rangemaster cadre delivered a number of classroom blocks of instruction. We also spent a couple of hours each day on the range, with high level shooting. Ten

attendees were added to the Wall of Fame for the Pistol Master Award, recognizing their exceptional performance with the concealed handgun. The next such event is back at Royal Range on Dec 5-6, 2026. There are already several people registered and this event will fill well in advance, so make your plans now.

Dec 5-6 Instructor Reunion & Conference  
Royal Range, Nashville, TN (All Rangemaster Staff)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685ec45cf02127913e36f6e7>





## **UPCOMING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

Jan 9-11, Cognitive Pistol/Tac Anatomy,  
Lakeland, FL (John Hearne)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685ea3e5f02127913e32f833>

Jan 10-11, Combative Pistol, Powder Springs, GA  
(Aqil Qadir)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eb493f02127913e347a9a>

Feb 6-8 Instructor Course Lakeland, FL  
(Tom Givens)

<https://manager.corsizio.com/events/685eaa69f02127913e339494>

Feb 21-22 Advanced Instructor Lakeland, FL  
(Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eabb0f02127913e33c516>

March 13-15 Master Lakeland, FL (Tom Givens)

<https://manager.corsizio.com/events/685eac92f02127913e33cb50>

March 20-22, Instructor Course , Beaumont, TX  
(Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eade2f02127913e33e027>

March 20-22, Shotgun Instructor, Boondocks, MS  
(Tim Chandler & Ashton Ray)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eb39df02127913e34644b>