



Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

From Good to Great: Achieving Breakthrough Performance

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Training Alert: You will not find a lack of opinions about required skill-sets for achieving breakthrough performance. Some people, predictably, will read this article and proclaim bullshit. So, please remember there is no shortage of opinions. Everyone has one!

The “alert” notwithstanding, this article is based on selected principles of learning theory and systemic change; specifically, learning curves and performance ceilings. The article uses a ruggedized miniature reticle (aka, “red dot” optic) as a hypothetical case in point; however, the article is not about how to use a red dot optic. The ideas shared below apply to learning any significantly new skill that could take you to higher levels of performance; for example, informed situational awareness skills, shoot and move skills, and defensive shooting skills.

Achieving Breakthrough Performance

Jim Collins (2001) famously proclaimed “Good is the enemy of great.” Although he was focusing on organizational performance, his insights also apply to shooting performance; that is, “good” shooters are often content with being good and rarely do what’s necessary to become “great” shooters.

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you always get what you’ve always gotten” (Quote Investigator, 2016). This oft-repeated adage historically attributed to Henry Ford, Jessie Potter, Dayle K. Maloney, Cathy Bolger, Susan Jeffers, Jackie “Moms” Mabley, Tony Robbins, or Anonymous, captures a very important principle for learning new skills. Relating the adage to firearms, if you continue to practice the skills you have you will continue to get the results you’ve been

getting. If you want better and more effective results, you need to breakthrough your performance ceiling (discussed below) to reach new levels of performance.

As a case in point, let’s say you want to learn to use a ruggedized miniature reticle (RMR, often called a “red dot”). When mastered, a “red dot” optic offers shooters a high degree of accuracy. That optic is also helpful for aging shooters, or others, who have difficulty seeing the handgun’s front sight clearly.

Learning to use a red dot optic, however, is challenging for some people. Mastering the use of the red dot requires breakthrough learning; that is, you must breakthrough your current performance ceiling for using iron sights to gain new level of skill using the red dot.

Learning Curves and Performance Ceilings

As firearm owners, many of us eventually bump up against our performance ceiling where we keep doing what we have always done and don’t make significant improvements. That performance ceiling is the red line shown in Figure 1, below.

In Figure1, you also see a black line and a green line, as well as the letters “A,” and “B,” and “C.” The black line represents the learning you experienced to achieve your current skill level using iron sights. As a new shooter, you likely struggled to gain proficiency (represented by the downward slope of the black line). After you reached the bottom of your learning curve you started moving upward to greater levels of proficiency (represented by the upward slope of the black line). Eventually, if you keep

doing what you have been doing, your proficiency level will hit a performance ceiling (represented by the red line). In practical terms, it means that no matter how much you try to improve your current skill set using iron sights, you will not move to a higher level of performance that can be achieved using a red dot optic unless you start a new learning curve for a new game-changing skill set (represented by the green line).

breakthrough your performance ceiling (represented by the "B" in Figure 1).

The best time to start learning new skills is when you are experiencing success with your current skill set (as represented by the uphill slope of the black line), you are motivated to learn, and your current skill set hasn't yet bumped up against your performance ceiling. A hypothetical "best time" is marked as "A" in Figure 1.

So, now let's make you the person in Figure 2. You are a fairly good shooter using iron sights. The line you are standing on represents your "current skill level" using those sights. Although you are a fairly good shooter, you want to become significantly better by learning to use a red dot optic so you buy one and start training to use it. That starting point is labeled as "A" in Figure 2.

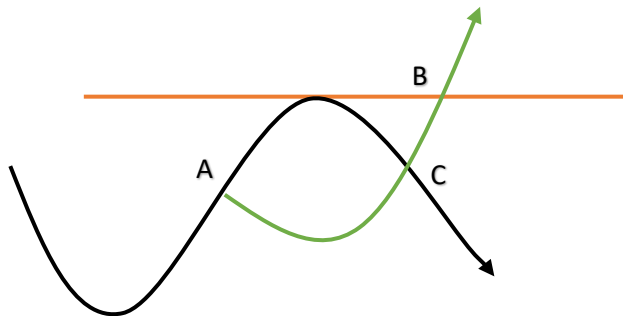
All new learning follows a predictable and unavoidable learning curve as illustrated in Figure 2. Again, as with the black line in Figure 1, as you start to learn new breakthrough level skills (as represented by the "A"), you will experience a temporary downhill period of incompetence (the downward slope of the green line). As we say in the field of systemic change (Duffy, 2010), the first step toward a new way of doing things is always down.

When people experience unexpected or prolonged periods of incompetence while learning new skills, they often bail out of the learning curve and return to what

they were doing (represented by the red line and "B" in Figure 2); thereby giving truth to the adage, "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Eventually, if you stick with your training program, your skill

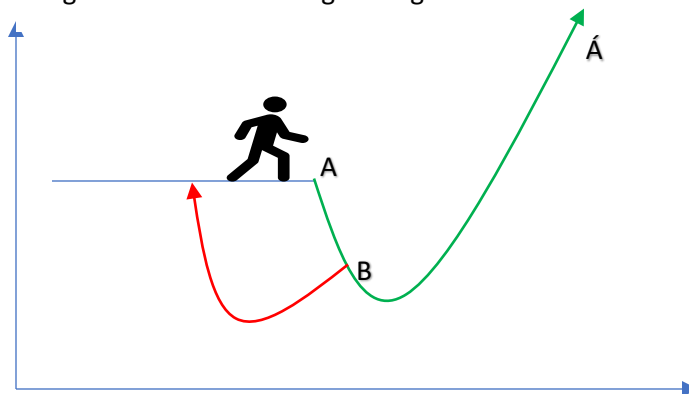
Figure 1: Achieving Breakthrough Performance



As noted above, once your performance level hits its ceiling, no matter what you do using the old skills you will not make significant improvements. If you don't practice often, or as you age, your current skill levels will start to fade (technically called entropy) as represented by the downward slope labeled "C" on the black line.

However, if you want to achieve new firearms proficiency levels you will need to

Figure 2: The more things change...



proficiency will increase and you will start moving

toward your desired goal of achieving breakthrough level skills as represented by \dot{A} in Figure 2.

CONCLUSION

This article described learning challenges shooters face when trying to move to higher levels of performance. Learning to use a red dot optic was used as a hypothetical case in point, but the principles discussed apply to learning and mastering any new skill such as informed situational awareness skills, and defensive shooting skills.

Outdated or incorrect knowledge, habits, skills, attitudes, or beliefs often block learning new knowledge and skills. An example of an attitude we sometimes encounter in our classes goes like this: "I'm a good shooter. I have been shooting since I was a kid. I can shoot the flame off a candle." Okay, but do you know how to use a handgun in a deadly force situation where someone is shooting back at you? Probably not, unless you are a combat veteran.

An attitude like the one highlighted in the preceding paragraph needs to be "unlearned." Unlearning refers to the process of discarding or letting go of previously acquired knowledge, habits, skills, attitudes, or beliefs that are no longer useful, relevant, or effective. This process often involves discarding outdated or incorrect information and replacing it with new, accurate, and more effective knowledge and skills.

Unlearning is essential for personal growth and adaptation, especially in environments where new information and skills are constantly emerging. It's about being open to change and willing to update one's attitudes, concepts, and skills.

Another point worth mentioning is that the depth of the learning curve decline as represented by the downward slope of the black line in Figure 1 and the green line in Figure 2 will vary. Some individuals will blast right through the learning curve. Others will take longer; and, as mentioned earlier, some will bail out and return to their old skill levels.

The key to success is to "stay in the fight."

References

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Quote Investigator (2016). Available online at <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2016/04/25/get/>

About the Author

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger

School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA).

He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to the preservation and advancement of gun owners' rights in Maryland.

He is the co-founder and vice president of the Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be contacted at 443-472-0216 or at frank@spartanftg.com.

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About the Spartan Firearms Training Group

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC, (www.spartanftg.com) is a Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015. At the end of March, 2025, we will enter our 11th year of business and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training
- Long distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training

- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar is found at [Calendar - Spartan Firearms Training Group](#)

Scheduling or training questions should be directed to Paul Duffy. He can be contacted at 410-707-2992 or at Paul@spartanftg.com.

YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING; NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT. TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!