



PHYSICAL FITNESS

MASTERY OF THE BASICS

BY GREG AMUNDSON

MASTERY AND VIRTUOSITY

When it comes to the integration of an officer's mind, body and spirit, it isn't just about repetition. It's about mastery. As a special agent trainee at the Drug Enforcement Administration Academy, this principle was drilled into me by the lead DEA firearms instructor. We performed thousands of draws from concealment, thousands of dry-fire trigger presses, and thousands of weapon manipulation drills, all under his drill sergeant-like demand for mastery.

BASICS, MASTERED

If there's a secret to realizing your greatness as a warrior-athlete in the profession of protection and service, it's investing in long-term, deep practice of the basic skills your life depends upon. Become obsessed with perfecting how you do a squat, a push-up, or a toes-to-bar movement. Become equally obsessed with perfecting your draw stroke, both from concealment and duty belt. Become an expert in all aspects of gun fighting: reloading, malfunction clearing, and close- and long-



I am so grateful to be serving as the new Physical Fitness section chair for the NTOA. It is truly humbling to contribute to an organization I have held in the highest esteem for nearly 20 years. I look forward to sharing my passion for integrated fitness in the years to come.

Thank you for your dedication to the high calling of law enforcement.

~ Greg Amundson

on to other things; she continues her practice. Golf is another example. Great golfers don't let a day go by without practicing their fundamental swings. When a top player's game begins to slide off the rails, he may start over at the very beginning, rebuilding his swing from the ground up.

The late Shotokan karate master, Gichin Funakoshi, was a great teacher of this lesson. He once brought together 100 of his finest students, black belts all, for a special training session. The martial artists crowded around, waiting to hear the secret insight they were expecting from Funakoshi.

There was some confusion while they waited, because Master Funakoshi had dropped into what's called the horse stance, and with his right hand began silently executing an outward forearm block with his eyes looking straight ahead. Over and over — 20 repetitions — the karate master continued performing the movement. Then his eyes moved and, as he continued performing outward forearm blocks, he watched the workings of his arm, the rotation and the angles, transfixed.

He continued in this manner for another 20 repetitions or more. Meanwhile, his students — all hoping for advanced instruction in karate — awaited the secret techniques that he would soon impart. They were shocked when at last he spoke, saying, "I think I'm finally just starting to understand this technique."

In this short, cogent presentation, Funakoshi had delivered a remarkable lesson about what mastery truly is: a state of mind, riveted to a profound purpose, with an obsession to learn and free of the pull of ego.

My understanding of the path to mastery is grounded both in my martial arts training and in being coached by Greg Glassman, the founder of CrossFit. Coach frequently emphasized the concept of "virtuosity" in our approach to workouts. He used the word often, pressing us to execute movements with virtuosity.

I knew this had something to do with performing the movements skillfully, but one day after a workout I asked Glassman why this word had so much importance for him. He related a story of a day, years earlier, when

range combat accuracy. Become adept in defensive tactics, both standing, in a clinch and on the ground. Develop the character traits of compassion, patience and willingness to practice tough-love.

Imagine a great violinist who spends time each day practicing the fundamentals of playing her instrument. When she first learns the bow strokes, she doesn't check it off the list and move



he had gone to watch a high school gymnastics competition in Los Angeles, in a large, packed gym. A number of gymnasts were performing routines throughout the competition venue, on parallel bars, a horse, on the rings, the balance beam and the floor. It was noisy, but at one point a hush fell over the gym. He said it took him a moment to figure out what had caused the deep silence, and that he was expecting something incredible.

The crowd had become mesmerized by a gymnast who was on the rings and holding a simple L-sit. He was gripping both rings with his hands, and holding

himself up with his legs extended horizontally. This fixation struck Glassman as odd. After all, the L-sit is such a basic movement in gymnastics that you don't even get any points for doing it. The points come from executing more complicated movements. But Glassman figured out what the drama was all about: This gymnast was performing the L-sit incredibly well. His definition for virtuosity was related to this experience in his life.

It was a simple position, one that gymnasts are introduced to on their first day of practice, but this athlete had an entire audience spellbound for

reasons they may have had a hard time articulating.

When a master performs a common act with uncommon skill, we seem to perceive it almost on a subconscious level. I recently attended the world renowned and prestigious Los Angeles Police Department Handgun Instructor Training School (HITS). The primary instructor exemplified this essence of mastery described above, and demanded the same skill of my HITS class.

CONCLUSION

This commitment to mastery of the basics and pursuit of virtuosity is what separates a good cop from a great cop. Mastery and virtuosity are qualities of the modern day warrior. I challenge and encourage you to bring a sense of mastery and virtuosity into your physical fitness training, in addition to every other warrior skill set needed in the law enforcement profession. The more competent in these skills you become, the more focused, present and effective you will be on the job.

And remember: Train like your life depends on it — because it does.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Amundson has served in local, state and federal law enforcement for more than 18 years in numerous capacities including SWAT, field training officer, defensive tactics instructor and sniper. He also served as a U.S. Army Military Police Captain and TAC Officer where he instructed leadership and Army combatives at the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School. He is a Black Belt in Krav Maga and honor graduate of the Los Angeles PD Handgun Instructor School (HITS). He currently serves as a reserve deputy and law enforcement chaplain for the Santa Cruz (CA) Harbor Patrol. Amundson is the author of two bestselling books, and is a graduate student at Western Seminary pursuing a master's of divinity with an emphasis in chaplaincy.