

When Every Second Counts!

In the first few moments of a critical situation, your actions (or inactions) could have a dramatic impact on the outcome. Our expert author says better mental training can make you a much better performer in the clutch.

Learning to Become Response Able

By Ted Buffington

"Events and situations are defined within the first seven seconds." Those first few moments determine if you will focus - go into the zone; fold - panic, choke, fall apart; or freeze - become paralyzed by fear. Focus, Fold, or Freeze (F3) behaviors will be triggered by either a response or a reaction reflex.

The seven seconds starts when you become aware. Insurance company research indicates that from the time an event happens to the time you become startled is about 1.5 seconds.

When I refer to the startle reflex don't infer that it is always a jerky, jump-out-of-your-skin, flinching type of reaction. Your startle reflex can be trained to become a response.

If you are in a role where you have to train others to prepare for emergencies, you must understand that people have a default reaction or response reflex.

The key to getting people more clear and response able lies in teaching them how to manage their perceptions and interpretations of events.

Understanding the startle reflex is vital to becoming effectively alert. If your startle reflex triggers a *reaction* alert, your awareness will be impaired.

If you're first reaction is, "Oh sh__t!" you will behave consistent with that declaration. You will try to get away from the situation.

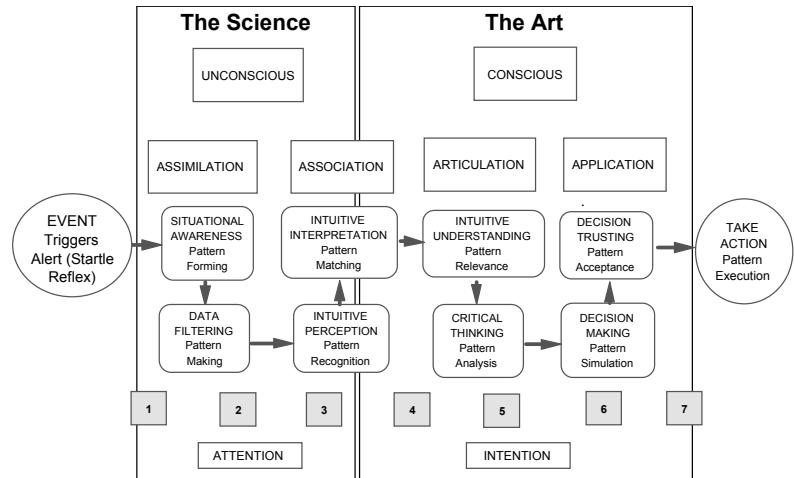
The other option is to develop a response able reflex. If your startle reflex triggers an initial *response* alert your awareness will be heightened and your mind will be directed externally.

I teach that you should train to condition a reflex of, "Hmm, that's interesting!" It buys you time. Remember, you might only have seven seconds to become focused.

When you declare "interesting," your mind has to ask, "What's interesting about it?" You will be able to obtain and sustain situational awareness.

Let's look at the respond/react process from a high level.

Mental Process Flow



At a high level view you can see how the event flows and transitions from the *startle reflex* to *taking action*.

The art of training others to be response able starts by teaching the importance of making finer and finer distinctions. The more distinctions you can make the clearer your perceptions, decisions, and actions.

Making finer distinctions keeps your mind engaged in the process of observing the details of the unfolding events. This provides an opportunity to realize more options for dealing with the event.

There are four basic areas that you can immediately start to train yourself and others to practice. These are Assimilation, Association, Articulation, and Application. Practice in each of these areas will increase your distinction making skills and provide greater clarity in a crisis.

Assimilation:

Assimilation has to do with simply taking in data and information. The skill to develop is to learn to receive without attaching too quickly to any particular part of what you are receiving. The more you can receive the longer you can delay making a judgment, inference, opinions, or projecting your own interpretations on the event. Another word for assimilate is absorb.

Examples of assimilating include listening to an orchestra, tasting fine food or wine, getting lost in a good book, and watching a sunset.

Learning and practicing to assimilate will enhance your ability to make finer and finer distinctions.

Association:

There is a point where some thing from what you have assimilated will trigger an association with something familiar. The skill to develop here is to practice patience in attaching to quickly to what you think is familiar.

The *association* process deals primarily with Perceptions and Interpretations. Your Associations could be either positive or negative depending on how you have stored the familiar, previous experience.

Learning to be focused is the result of choosing an association that moves you to confident action. Folding and freezing are the result of not being able to choose or manage your associations – perceptions and interpretations.

Articulation:

Managing your Associations moves you toward understanding. This requires *articulation*. For you to truly understand something, you must be able to express your understanding either in words or behaviors. This includes your self-talk.

The skill to develop here is to explain or demonstrate the relevancy of what is familiar (association) with what is missing or needed to influence the immediate situation. It is in the *articulation* part of the mental process that you would run a mental simulation of possible actions.

Application:

The final step in the mental process flow is *application*. When you trust that the simulated actions are appropriate for the immediate situation, you will then apply that understanding and take action.

Key Points to Remember:

- **Practice to Assimilate** – observe in a way that you are looking to reveal what’s interesting.
- **Practice to Associate** - question your perceptions and interpretations.
- **Practice to Articulate** – clearly explain distinctions, nuances, and minor details.
- **Practice to Apply** – integrate mental performance training into your preparation exercises and drills.

Bottom line:

Response ability is **NOT** the result of *mind over matter*...you can't just wish to be resourceful in a crisis. It **IS** about *matter over mind*...if what you want matters enough you won't mind what you have to learn or practice to get yourself and others focused in critical situations.

Ted Buffington, founder and CEO of Achievement By Design®, is an internationally recognized expert in 'performance under pressure' related processes & patterning methodologies. He has nearly thirty years of experience & research in sports psychology, martial arts, and working with 'focus' related experts in sports; public safety; military; emergency management; and Fortune 500 corporations.