

Developing “Fingertip Feel” Shaping and Reshaping Dynamic Encounters and Gaining the Advantage

By Fred Leland

“When the fight starts you do not have time to stop and think about the fundamentals. ~Chet Richards, Certain to Win

Chet Richards wrote an interesting piece [Developing the Touch](#), in which he asks the question, **if *Fingerspitzengefühl* (fingertip feel) can be taught, why do so few people have it?** He goes on to make two key points:

First, Fingerspitzengefühl is a skill, so although most people can get better at it, some are going to get a lot better.

Second, it’s a strange kind of skill, not for performing complicated or even dangerous tasks mystically well, but for sensing what is going on among groups of people in conflict and then influencing what happens.

Chet’s points got me to thinking about, why is it we in law enforcement often times have difficulty applying what we know to a given situation? How do we get better at it? The answer lies in creating and nurturing our abilities in “Operational Art” taking what you know and being able to apply it to a given set of circumstances to affect your strategy and to bring an end to a potentially violent occurrence using appropriate tactics.

To do this takes awareness, discipline, adaptability, skill development and strength of character to focus our efforts on the task at hand to meet our overall intent. You cannot learn this by sitting in some training class listening to an instructor give you a checklist formula on how to solve a particular set of problems. As Chet states;

“The first problem in learning Fingerspitzengefühl is that you can’t learn it by yourself. You have to have at least two groups of people to practice with — your team and some opponents.”

Our training must involve interaction with an adversary, **red teaming** comes to mind.

Red Teaming is an approach to understanding our adversary and the methods they use. To develop a fingertip feel and maneuver we must possess numerous skills and be able to apply those skills individually and collectively if we are to be as effective as we need to be, to win.

Winning requires knowing many things, including an understanding of the environment, the climate of the situation, psychology, physiology, decision making, social skills, combative skills, firearms skills, **and leadership** and how they apply to the overall mission or intent. Understanding the *whole of conflict and violence* allows us to get a better feel for the situation and allows us to, use attributes and ability to apply tactics in an effort to deceive, appear confusing to our adversary who generates disharmony or surprise, panic. This allows us to seize and keep the initiative and hence exploit weaknesses and opportunities to gain compliance or utilize reasonable force options.

Training must have this focus in mind. Use **scenario based training** and experiential learning with tactical decision games, being the foundation of your training. Include free play exercises to include force on force exercises with simmunitions to help create and nurture fingertip feel.

In an engagement all these factors **combine in a synergistic way** and require interaction with your adversary(s), fellow officers and the community. Interaction with your adversary(s) allows you to gather actionable information to utilize in your efforts to solve whatever strategic and tactical problem you face. Information you have gathered only becomes actionable if you have the ability to take what you know and apply it in a way that accords with the circumstances and your overall intent. You must always keep

in mind that it is impossible to control exactly how the adversary(s) will respond to your actions. So the goal is to control the adversary's mindset with both direct and/or indirect action which takes decision making and adaptability.

Interaction, Insight and imagination are needed to adapt tactics and apply them in an initiative driven way to the particular problem at hand. The ability to apply these attributes in a violent encounter help to put you in a position of advantage. You can then seize the initiative on your terms. You control the tempo of things with interaction-- moving in, tactically loitering, tactically swarming, tactically retreating, communication, negotiation, deception, and reasonable force options, etc. A balance of persuasion and force options focused on preventing or resolving the problem. This ability or *fingertip feel* to sense the environment and climate of the situation via the decision making cycle is known as "*operational art*" a much needed concept to understand if we are to connect our endgame (strategy) with how we play the game (tactics).

Learning the *art of operations* and develop the *fingertip feel* for applying tactics during interplay between adversaries, you can see is crucial to our success. This interplay teaches us that interaction leads to maneuver and maneuver opens up opportunities to exploit weaknesses. Then through superior situational awareness and insights you develop innovative ideas as you accord with an adversary. This leads to well thought out and/or intuitive decisions and actions to meet our strategic goals, whatever those goals may be.

In essence a highly developed *fingertip feel* allows us to shape and reshape the circumstances and conditions. We are not merely responding we are setting up the situation or as Sun Tzu stated:

"Therefore it is said that victorious warriors win first, then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first, then seek to win."

When having to perform effectively in the **complex circumstances conflict and violence** offer, we must strive to overcome obstacles and focus on exploiting weaknesses and avoiding adversarial strengths. This takes ability to intuitively feel the climate of an ongoing and rapidly changing situation and then adapt accordingly.

The ability and or timing of adaptation can be fleeting as opportunities present and close often times very quickly. Developing fingertip feel so that we can rapidly transition fluidly as the circumstances require is critical. Boyd called these fast transient Maneuvers.

*“Generate a rapidly changing environment (quick/clear observations, orientation and decisions, fast-tempo, fast transient maneuvers, quick kill). Inhibit an adversary’s capacity to adapt to such an environment (cloud or distort his observations, orientation, and decisions and impede his actions) simultaneously compress own time and stretch-out adversary time to generate a favorable mismatch in time/ability to shape and adapt to change. **Goal:** Collapse adversary’s system into confusion and disorder causing him to over and under react to activity that appears simultaneously menacing as well as ambiguous, chaotic, or misleading.”*

Law Enforcement Misfortunes: Developing a Fingertip Feel to Reduce:

Conflict is a clash between two adaptive systems. With adapting adversaries you cannot predict exactly what’s going to happen next, because there are things going on that you cannot see, or hear. For example: the numerous thoughts going through an adversaries mind: *“I will do what I am asked,” “I will not do what I am asked,” “I will escape,” “I will fight,” “I will assault,” “I will kill,” “I will play dumb until...,” “I will stab,” “I will shoot,” “he looks prepared I will comply,” “he looks complacent I will not comply,” etc.* It is important to remember that the adversary has his own objectives; also, they have plans that conflict with the friendly side, therein creating further conflict and hence the need for adaptation.

If one side pauses to try and figure out (analysis) what's happening or gather more explicit (precise) information, it could be over with unfavorable results. Therefore, the obvious need for conditioning tactical judgment or implicit guidance and control is absolutely necessary. Both direct and indirect experiences come into play here.

To adapt to a walking, talking and thinking adversary takes training cops how to make decisions and take actions based on the situation verses the traditional training that is focused on policy and procedure, checklists or canned responses telling cops what to do. What to do in one set of circumstances can get you hurt or killed in another. It is time we open our eyes to this reality.

Law Enforcement history; Newhall, Waco, Ruby Ridge, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Trooper Mark Coates, Constable Lunsford, Officer Kyle Dinkheller, Oakland PD (2009), Pittsburg (2009), Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, FL (2009), Seminole County Sheriff's Office, Ok (2009) Lakewood WA (2009), the 43 officer killed in the line of duty thus far in 2010 and the countless other lesson learned from law enforcement history we should heed and adapt accordingly.

To answer the Chet's question **If *Fingerspitzengefühl* (fingertip feel) can be taught, why do so few people have it?** I submit law enforcement spends too much time developing policies and procedures that stifle initiative and the ability to use interaction, Insight and Imagination. These attributes are the building blocks of police operational art and **we spend little time, if any developing them**. What we need to do is develop a sense of mission and high morale. This takes leadership that knows how to develop people and use people and their ideas in a positive way that leads to developing individual, unit, shift and organizational discipline to train and prepare.

Presence of mind and superior situational awareness should alert our sense of urgency that we must not focus on the physical aspects of conflict only. Performing in extreme situations requires developing a *fingertip feel* to manipulate the **moral, mental**

and physical dimensions of conflict. Knowing this and how to apply the appropriate methods at the appropriate time takes fine tuned and honed skills, a fingertip feel for Police operational Art!

Have you developed yours?

Stay Oriented!

Fred