



You Don't Know What You Don't Know!

By Josh Stone – Florida Firearms Training Instructor

The year was 2016 and I was a young 23 year old Marine, freshly turned civilian. I carried a .45acp 1911 Government model and I had just started working at a local gun range. I came into that job thinking I knew everything about firearms, tactics and gun fighting.

After all I was a firearms and tactics instructor in the Marine Corps! I had taught the US Marines, along with several other militaries around the world. Heck, even some of my input went into the Standard Operating Procedures for how we then trained Marines to qualify every year in Okinawa Japan. In 2016, I thought my resume was untouchable...I was about to discover otherwise.

I was always a top shot in my battalion, even amongst the other instructors there were few who could beat me. My abilities and experience to that point led me to honestly believe that everyone I now worked with in the civilian world couldn't come near my skill. What did anyone at my new job know? A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.

I continued in my misconception, until one day I saw some of my new colleagues shooting and I realized just how wrong I was. There was this one guy in particular who was shooting as accurately as I could, but much faster, faster than I thought was physically possible (we were never really taught how to shoot quickly in the Marine Corps. Emphasis was always placed on accuracy with very generous par times) THAT was the moment that I began to realize that I didn't know everything I thought I did.

Fast forward to 2019. I was no longer working at that local gun range. Instead I was a firearms manager another store. I had done considerable research (mostly geared in the "combative firearms competition" realm like IDPA, USPSA, and IPSC) and my skills had grown considerably in a short amount of time (compared to where they were when I first left the Marine Corps). And no, you'll be glad to hear, I no longer carried the .45 1911.

I had grown substantially in both skill and knowledge, so now again my confidence and additional knowledge and skills allowed me again, to slip into believing I knew everything there was to know (or at least pretty darn close to it) about gun fighting. It was around that time that I first came across a company called Florida Firearms Training. FFT seemed to be everywhere. Whenever I wanted to go shoot, talk to locals about training or even hustle gun ranges for students the FFT name would come up over and over again.

After doing a bit of research and meeting with the owners, I was offered a position and came onboard. I was pumped and very excited at the opportunity to show these guys how much I knew. But....you guesses it, when I first came on board it was almost a complete repeat of when I left the Marine Corps. I thought I was hot stuff and I thought all the instructors on the team had a thing or two to learn from me... You may see where this is going!

I even disagreed with a lot of things they taught and I had no problem voicing it. It was on one such day that I got the opportunity to stick my foot so far down my mouth I could taste cotton for the next month. Will (the lead instructor for the team) was teaching a class and it had elements to it that I had never heard of. One such element was point shooting (I had heard of point shooting, but not in detail that this class expanded on) In the Marine Corps we were taught that point shooting was basically shoving your gun out and squeezing the trigger, and if the enemy was further than an arm's length away, you could just forget about it, as it was a contact distance technique.

So I waited until after all the students left I called out Will on what I thought to be a total bogus technique. He told me to put a steel plate up. He then went out about 50 yards up range and with a Glock 19 with no sights (sights had been removed from the slide) proceeded to draw and point shoot / hit that steel plate over and over again. After about the 6 or 7th shot he holstered the pistol, turned to me and said "I could do this all day, but we need to pack up and go home"

...Hmm... It was at this point that I started to question everything I thought I knew. And that's just it. I THOUGHT I KNEW everything, but this older, funny sounding British gentleman was showing me entire realms and worlds about shooting that I didn't even know existed. Then as time went on, I met some of the other members of the team and found that each and every one of them spanked me in similar fashion. Maybe there was more to learn!

I realized just how little I actually knew about gun fighting. I realized that where I stood then, was basically where the iceberg met the water...But at least I realized it.

The problem is "you don't know what you don't know". So I never knew to seek out these other techniques because I didn't even know they existed. This is called the Dunning-Kruger effect and boy did I have it bad. I thought I was so much better than I actually was because my understanding of what was left to learn was so skewed that I thought I knew 90% of what the world had to teach me about my trade. Its only when I stood next to true giants did I realize just how small I was.

My thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. I read book after book and watched video after video. Every book referenced three more (which I noted and put in my Amazon or Ebay cart for later purchase), each video led to hours more. I was so upset with myself for believing I knew everything. But was it my fault?...No ...again "you don't know, what you don't know!" I realized I was so far behind compared to my new peers, only because I put up mental road blocks for so many years, thinking I was better than I was.

From there on I was the first on the range in the morning, reviewing things I'd learned in the classes prior and then the last one off the range trying to solidify things learned that day.

Today I come to class and work humble and ready to learn. I now know I have much to learn, but in all the things I didn't know before, that was the singularly biggest unknown. Mine is not a unique experience. It is unfortunately a common one. A lot of people "don't know what they don't know" and that leads them to believe that what they do know... must be the extent of that is left to be known. And thus is the problem with the Dunning-Kruger effect.

My friends, what I have learnt from this experience over the last 7 years can be summed up into this simple advice: Be humble, shut your mouth and open your mind, there is still much to learn. Sometimes a teacher, but always a student. I still stand among giants as a small man today but at least I know it now! Quote: "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants." Isaac Newton

