

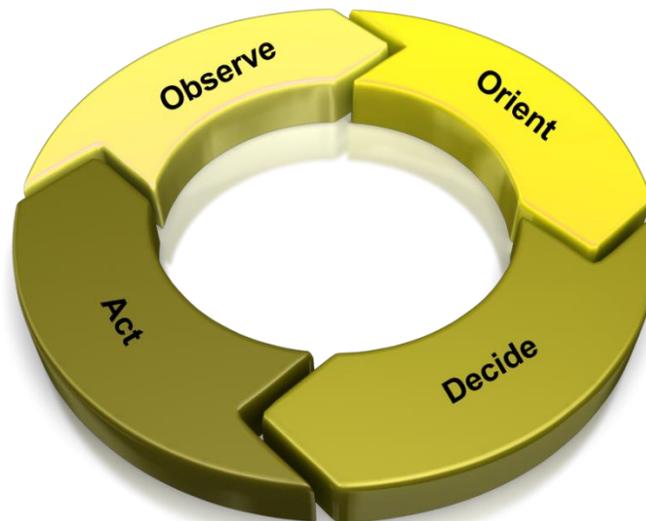


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A Deeper Dive into the OODA Loop

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The OODA Loop is a decision making model which stands for: **Observe**, **Orient**, **Decide**, and **Act**. The predominant factor in the OODA Loop is to observe first and move through the loop faster than your adversary so that your adversary is responding to information that is no longer relevant because the situation has changed.



Key points for each step of the OODA Loop:

Observe:

- One or more adversaries enter into the cycle.
- The more adversaries you encounter the more OODA loops you are contending with resulting in a significantly more complicated engagement.
- **Whoever observes first has an advantage.** You cannot defend yourself if you fail to observe a threat(s). The party who has failed to “Observe” is behind the loop and at a distinct disadvantage. Failure to rapidly observe and begin processing through the loop can quickly lead to failure (i.e., severe injury or death).

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- **Just because you “look” does not mean you “see.”** You must “see” what you are looking at and obtain accurate identification. Failure to make an accurate identification can lead to decisions being enacted based on incorrect information. This can result in disastrous decisions leading to unjustified actions. For example, does the threat have a gun in his hand or is it a harmless cell phone or other innocuous item?

- When you “look” you must “see” and comprehend what it is you actually are seeing.

⇒ **Target identification is a critically important skill.**

- It is not uncommon to hear stories of people involved in auto accidents while changing lanes. The driver will often say, *“I ‘looked’ and thought the lane was clear. I didn’t “see” another vehicle.”*

This is a perfect example of someone who “looks” but fails to actually “see” what is really occurring. Target identification is a skill that must be finely developed. As a firearms instructor, I have facilitated judgmental shooting drills where multiple targets are lined up in a row that have various targets. Some targets have a bad guy with a weapon, a mom holding a child, a plainclothes police officer holding his firearm with a badge displayed, or a plainclothes officer holding a badge with his arm extended. The student who is participating in this drill is turned facing away from the targets and is directed to turn around and engage only lethal targets. Inevitably there will be students who shoot the police officer who is only holding a badge. These students say, *“I thought it was a gun,”* or *“I saw it was a badge, but I pulled the trigger too fast.”* In a real situation this is never an acceptable response. It is crucial to not only ‘look’ but to ‘see’ and understand what it is you are looking at. Never underestimate the importance of this topic especially in a training environment. Training must prepare students to function in a real world environment where stress, distance, and timing will always be factors. **Target identification is a critical skill.**

- If you lack **situational awareness** it is difficult to progress through the OODA Loop because you can become stuck at “Observe.”

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Orient:

- Once you observe the threat(s) you must orient yourself to the threat and/or the situation itself.
- You will generally be under a **time constraint** to orient yourself. Violent encounters tend to be dynamic and the environment is constantly changing. Failure to “Orient” in a timely manner can lead to a change in the encounter which forces you to restart the loop at “Observe.”
- You will be **under pressure** and must make sense of the situation based on your observation. For example, you see an individual who is threatening you with an object in his hand. You have to determine what the object is, orient to the threat, and do this while under stress.

Decide:

- The ability to properly orient leads to a decision.
- The inability to process can lead to no decision being made where you become frozen (Condition Black.)

Act:

- Implementation of your decision.
- After implementation, you are now back at the beginning of the loop ready to re-observe.

The OODA Loop is about effective use of time in order to make critical decisions.

Everyone has the exact same amount of time so it becomes extremely important to make effective and productive use of very small time increments which can lead to your victory. Boyd’s intention was getting inside the mind of your adversary to disrupt his decision making ability by providing outdated or irrelevant information so the adversary cannot make a decision. In other words, *to get inside your adversaries loop*. When you move through the loop faster than your adversary, your adversary is always at a time deficit because he must go back to the beginning of the loop and start at observe.

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How does understanding of the OODA Loop benefit you?

A few key factors are important to understand in relation to the OODA Loop:

1. Time is equal for everyone so use it to your advantage.

Those who “observe” first are at an advantage. Those who fail to observe first will be behind the curve in the OODA loop. This is not an advantageous place to be when it comes to surviving a violent encounter.



2. It is you, the “individual,” that matters and determines outcomes much more than the equipment you carry. Do not become over-reliant on gear.

Just because you may not carry the latest and greatest gear does not mean you are doomed for failure. You are more valuable than the equipment around your waist so train to your capabilities. Your success is determined more by your software (brain) than by hardware (gear). Anytime you allow gear to determine the outcome of victory or defeat

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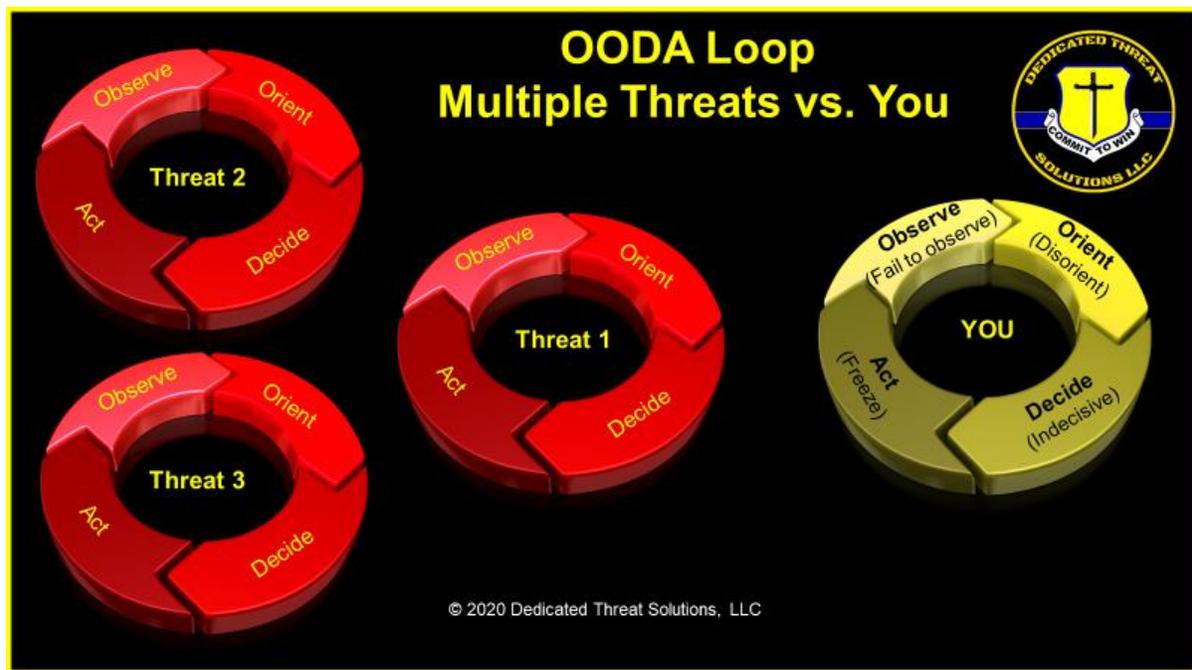
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you have set yourself up for failure by underestimating how your role in a confrontation perpetuates success much more than gear. You are the weapon system!

3. **The ability to move through the OODA Loop more quickly than your adversary provides a great advantage at a successful outcome even if the adversary appears to have perceived advantages such as size or strength.**

We see this in sporting events such a mixed martial arts (MMA) when one fighter is physically stronger, faster, or taller but still loses the fight due to poor decision making. Another good reason to train hard and never give up! Remember, real life isn't a sport!

Everyone goes through an OODA Loop process even if they are not cognitively aware of the process or its name. In other words, when you are engaged in a violent confrontation you are processing your OODA Loop but so is your adversary. If you have multiple threats the situation becomes more challenging because you have your OODA Loop to contend with but now you have multiple threats each with their own OODA Loop. The good news is the OODA Loop of your adversary can be short circuited causing a restart at observe.



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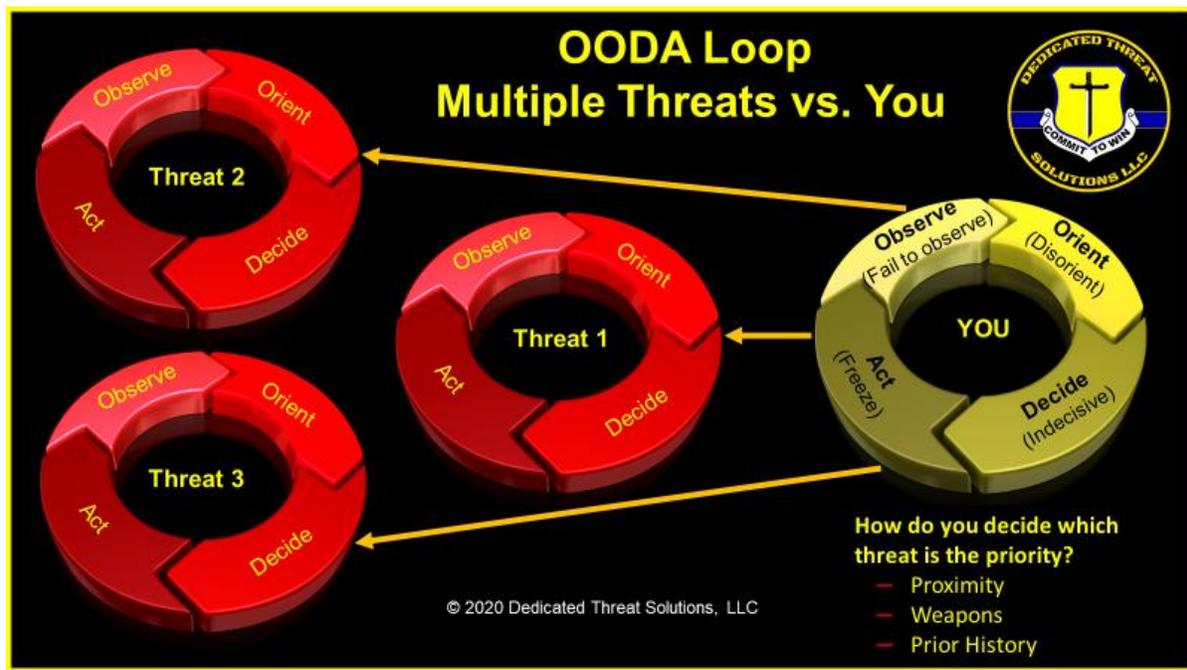


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If an adversary decides to harm you and initiates an attack, you are behind the curve in relation to the OODA Loop. You are now in a situation of trying to catch up by either:

- moving through the OODA loop more quickly than your adversary, OR
- you must initiate an action that resets the adversary's OODA loop back to observe

The key to success is the ability to create situations where one can make appropriate decisions more rapidly than one's adversary. Time is the dominant parameter. The person who processes through the OODA cycle in the shortest time prevails because his opponent is caught responding to information that has already changed. Having multiple adversaries makes this situation more challenging because you have to prioritize threats without losing situational awareness of the other threats.



Multiple threats requires you to multi-task a lot of information such as which threat(s) take priority, what action is needed to keep you safe, what information from the environment is relevant, and what information should be discarded. This is a lot for anyone to handle especially under stress and time constraints.

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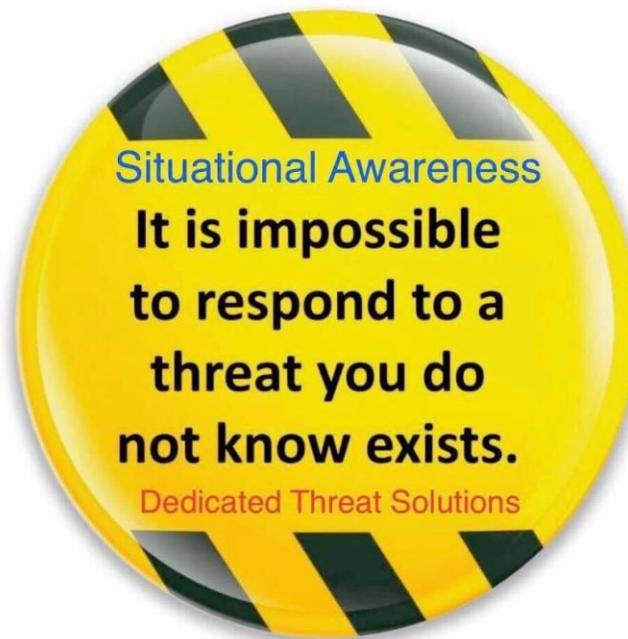


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Your ability to cycle through the OODA Loop more quickly than an attacker is vital for a successful resolution to a violent encounter. If you fail to maintain situational awareness you are significantly diminishing your ability to observe a threat and more likely than not, you have failed to remain in Condition Yellow.

It is impossible to respond to a threat you do not know exists.

It is also important to have the ability to reset your adversary's OODA Loop back to "observe" especially when taken by surprise and find yourself behind the OODA Loop.



It is important to continually improve your situational awareness skills. Most people are not nearly as good at situational awareness as they like to believe. As with any skill, situational awareness must be developed and practiced. Improving situational awareness can be achieved in part by understanding the Color Codes and the OODA Loop. Another necessary component is attending scenario based training where you progressively build your skillset with more challenging scenarios.

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Main Points:

- OODA Loop stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, Act
- Time is equal for everyone - use your time wisely
- In a violent encounter you will always be under a time constraint
- In a violent encounter the person who “observes” first is at an advantage
- Whoever process through the OODA Loop faster is generally victorious
- “Looking” is not the same as “seeing”
- Target identification is a critical skill to develop
- Any party to a violent encounter can have their OODA Loop reset back to “Observe”
- When dealing with multiple threats each threat has their own OODA Loop
- When dealing with multiple threats you must determine which threat takes priority
- Situational awareness is a critical skill that needs to be developed and practiced
- Most people are not near as good at situational awareness as they believe they are
- In a violent encounter you must never give up!

About the author

Scott Kirshner, M.Ed. has been a Parole Administrator, Supervisory Probation Officer, and a Corrections Officer. He has extensive experience as an officer survival trainer and has been a lead defensive tactics instructor, firearms instructor, and use of force instructor. He is the author of multiple safety related books which are available on Amazon.com. Mr. Kirshner is the owner and Lead Instructor of Dedicated Threat Solutions, LLC. The author can be reached at: info@dedicatedthreatsolutions.com or to learn more visit: www.dedicatedthreatsolutions.com

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