

Governing Energy

Awareness 101

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Military and aerospace professionals discuss at length the need to have *Situational Awareness (SA)*. This is code for having a *correct* understanding of events one faces during critical periods.ⁱ

However, there is a counter argument. We are all aware of our situation, it's just that many of us misinterpret our surroundings.ⁱⁱ

According to its proponents, individuals have Situational Awareness as a result of training and practice in difficult settings. In other words, it is a *learned capability*.

So why do even well trained and very experienced individuals lose or misunderstand what is happening around them and either blunder into trouble or take actions that may make their predicament worse? Throughout this series, we have discussed issues such as complacency, "Got-to-Get-There-Itis" and other behavioral problems. Often, our unsound mental models can get any of us into difficulty at any time and in any setting.ⁱⁱⁱ

Athletes training for the 2016 Summer Olympics realize that they need to "peak" at just the right time. They cannot remain at the very top of their game on a constant basis. This is true for those of us less gifted with athleticism as well.

Commonly called, "In the Zone" athletes have a feeling of total control over their situation. From the book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, this positive experience has been expressed as a *flow*. Achieving as many of the following nine components of the *flow* increases the "feeling of total control" over the situation.^{iv}

- **Challenge-skills balance**—confidence one has that his or her skills can meet the challenge
- **Action-awareness merging**—severe focus on the tasks at hand
- **Clear goals**—exactly what is required to accomplish the goal
- **Unambiguous feedback**—constant and real time focused feedback
- **Concentration**—like a laser beam
- **Sense of control**—belief one's actions can directly affect the outcome
- **Loss of self-consciousness**—"occurs when you are not constantly self-aware of your success"
- **Transformation of time**—effectively individuals lose the sense or tack of time
- **Autotelic experience**—internally, not rewards driven (love the job)

Whether we "go to our gut" or *sink* to the "level of our training," those managing critical infrastructure must know when to peak.^v Behavioral scientists indicate that this learned (but hardwired) *Intuition* is,

“formed by a collection of beliefs, experiences, and memories.”^{vi} It follows that our gut level intuition is a function of our level of training.

Our personal Situational Awareness must also contain an element of the awareness about our individual state. A true understanding of our strengths and weaknesses as well as cognizance about how to capitalize or mitigate is true SA.

The ancient Greeks apparently coined the term, “Know Thyself.”^{vii} In this context, perhaps we can rephrase it as “Know Thy Situation.”

Casual use of the term, “Situational Awareness” is in vogue now, particularly when consultants discuss subjects such as **Leadership** and **Safety**. As with other managerial buzzwords, we must look below the surface for the depth or lack thereof of these statements and initiatives based on them.

How does your organization know its Situational Awareness is on Target?

About the Author

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End Notes

ⁱ <https://www.uscg.mil/auxiliary/training/tct/chap5.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://modernsurvivalblog.com/security/barriers-to-situational-awareness/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.bea.aero/etudes/gethomeitis/gethomeitis.htm>

^{iv} <http://www.livescience.com/32620-how-do-athletes-get-in-the-zone-of-peak-performance.html>

^v <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-origin-of-the-quote-attributed-to-a-Navy-SEAL-Under-pressure-you-dont-rise-to-the-occasion-you-sink-to-the-level-of-your-training>

^{vi} <http://www.medicaldaily.com/your-gut-feeling-way-more-just-feeling-science-intuition-325338>

^{vii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_thyself