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# Quiet Eye Specifics & Gaze-Action Coupling

by Det/Sgt Jeff Johnsgaard



Since our article, "Taking Aim With the Quiet Eye" (ILEETA Journal Vol. 11, Ed. 2) we have received a lot of feedback and are pleased to be engaging in a high quality discussion around its application and training methods. There have been three recurring questions asked so we would like to openly address them in order to continue the discussion.

The three most asked questions were:

1. How to train an officer where to look in a situation, and set them up for optimal observations / perceptions to drive better decisions and actions?
2. When using the Quiet Eye technique, does the officer's visual focus shift from the threat/target to their front sight before they press the trigger?
3. How much training does it take to get an officer to the point where they can quickly present their pistol to a threat and have combat accurate fire while remaining visually focused on the threat?

Our initial Quiet Eye (QE) article was designed to be an introduction to the topic and help bring it into the realm of regular discussion for Law Enforcement trainers. Closely related to QE is the concept of gaze training which has immediate positive implications to officer skills like driving, firearms, de-escalation and overall improvement of decision-making and physical performance.

The first most asked question deals with training "gaze behavior" or teaching an officer where to look during a situation to help them make higher quality decisions and therefore increase performance. This question will be addressed in the follow-up to this article as it is a larger discussion, and one we have had great success with in technical application. We would like to take the time in a full article to lay out the specific tools.

This article will address the second two questions. Number two concerned the officer's actual eye focus asking; "When using the Quiet Eye technique, does the officer's visual focus shift from the threat/target to their front sight before they press the trigger?"

We did not specify this in the first article on purpose, as the discussion is a multifaceted one. The simple answer is "Yes", by shifting their focus from the target to the front sight (or complete rear sight to front sight to target alignment – several focal shifts) the officer is not utilizing the QE.

If what we are after is better performance in a gunfight then the answer is not so simple.

According to LEOKA statistics the typical distances where Law Enforcement is engaged in a gunfight are close and the statistics for Law Enforcement officers killed by a firearm feloniously between 1994 to 2016 saw over 80% (82.4%) killed within only 20 feet of the attacker (Johnsgaard & Vecchi, 2018).

## Firearms Skill Framework

It is our belief that officers must have the ability to use sighted fire (sight alignment & sight picture) as well as fire where their eyes do not focus on the sights but the threat (though these situations are typically at closer ranges to the threat). The former is not in keeping with the QE principle and the latter can be keeping with the QE principle.

To utilize the QE principle and have fire accurate enough for success in a gunfight at the LEOKA distances previously mentioned, the officer must have trained their eyes and their weapon presentation together. The convergence of where their eyes are looking and where their muzzle is aligned was introduced to us by Dr. Bill Lewinski of Force Science® as "Gaze-Action Coupling".

Another way of thinking of this concept is the linking of Perception & Action or Vision & Movement as one "program". Your interpretation of events, driving a decision to the high-level execution of a trained physical movement. Lewinski has worked with Dr. Vickers on

some extremely relevant QE research for Law Enforcement (Vickers & Lewinski, 2012).

Dr. Lewinski stated you could practice this coupling from any position you like. Holding the pistol out in front of you, holding it at your hip or even pointing it while doing a one hand handstand. Building on this concept we prefer to couple the positions described in our first article as we have found them to decrease the training time.

What does this have to do with winning a gunfight?

To dive into this we must first address the third question stated previously. Then we can discuss the answers in terms of actionable training you can offer.

Question three was;

"How much training does it take to get an officer to the point where they can quickly present their pistol to a threat and have combat accurate fire while remaining visually focused on the threat?"

That is the "million-dollar question". There are certainly people who can shoot with a pistol held at their hip extremely fast and accurately (see citations for Bob Mundan video example). But how long does it take to learn to do that? Is it even possible for everyone to reach that level of competence? Is it possible to have the same accuracy when dealing with a deadly force threat not just a non-threatening target? Lastly, and just as importantly, does learning to do this in anyway impede the use of sighted fire?

Possible Training Scar

To reiterate, we believe that a Law Enforcement officer needs to be competent with both traditionally sighted fire and a QE type of threat focused fire. Our main goal is to accomplish this as quickly as possible and without creating a training scar to not use sights when it is optimal to use them or vice versa.

There are some who argue it is impossible to shift your focus to the sights in a combat situation. We have seen this debated in the firearms training community where

some claim it is not possible to do. We do not prescribe to that as many officers can attest having used their sights in real shootings.

We also want to decrease the training time to be able to do both sight and threat focused fire. As stated already, the specific technique for pistol presentation is one way to do this. The following will briefly unpack our current understanding and best practice for this training progression and is meant as an outline for this article. We would be happy to answer specific questions on the fine points, if asked.

Three Main Progressions – Sighted Fire; Sighted Fire Done Quickly; QE / Threat Focused Fire

1. The technique for physical presentation to fire used is optimally one that places the barrel up in line with the line of sight as soon as possible. Please refer to our previous article for one example of this, the High Ready (page 11).

The High Ready embedded commands of:

Up – Touch – Roll – Slack – Sight – Press

- By training the officer on the "sight" part of the embedded commands to shift their eye focus and attention to the sight and confirming sight picture prior to releasing the shot, we are training the use of sights.
- We believe firing with the eye and attentional shift to the sights is the place to start officers. We have found it harder to start training officers to use a threat focus, even if using a more refined QE technique, and then teach sighted fire. We found a training scar occurred as a decreased ability to use sighted fire in scenario training and real encounters.
- Simultaneously developing, though to a lesser degree, when doing this process for the use of sights first and the use of a presentation technique that drives the pistol parallel with the barrel is that it also develops the person's weapon presentation toward their gaze /



intended target. That is the first part of the QE technique. Through many repetitions of firing with confirmed sight alignment the person will be training the pistol's presentation along with their line of sight and gaze.

- This can be trained on purpose with airsoft or other Non-Lethal Training Ammunitions. We interleave this "on purpose" training to help the officer increase their speed and accuracy.
  - Our training progression for sighted fire which helps aid the development of a gaze action coupling would be as follows.
- A. 3" target at 3 yards, stationary shooter, and stationary target. Vary that practice between 5" target at 5 yards and 1" target at 2 yards. We are striving for a time of 1.1 sec or under for one shot from High Ready. Many officers achieve under .79 regularly and those who practice regularly will be consistently under .69.
  - B. Next offering 2 or 3 targets at each of the distances using random practice. The idea here is if possible, have a target turn and the stationary shooter orientate to it and fire. Place the targets farther apart to force more orientation of the shooter. This is further developing the initial alignment though they will be visually "confirming" sights before trigger press.
  - C. Lastly, have the shooter moving as well as the targets moving or turning.
  - D. After competency is established and they are consistently able to achieve the goal we will take the officer back to being stationary on one target. We then teach them how to use the QE for threat focused fire and show them that physically the process is almost identical as what they have been training thus far. Individual limits for the officer's ability utilizing QE are established at various distances (2-3 yards, 5-7 yards, 8-10 yards).

## Training QE On Purpose

- Our hypothesis is the officer uses peripheral vision to help direct their pistol when presented. This parafoveal vision (a small belt of cells on the retina between the fovea and peripheral vision) is being "trained" at the same time (Sakurai, 2015).
  - We believe this peripheral vision is being used because we have blocked it on trained officers by placing a large piece of cardboard under their chin and asked them to perform the presentation to fire without the ability to see their pistol peripherally. It has shown a dramatic decrease in the accuracy of fire as the presentation and "coupling" of the eye's focus and barrel are not as similar.
  - The point is that the officer has feedback. Airsoft, live rounds, or even a laser strike that helps them immediately adjust their pistol presentation with what they are looking to hit. If this does not happen then there will not be learning taking place. Hanging a beach towel behind a paper target and shooting airsoft is as complex as this needs to be and is a very cost effective method of doing this.
  - We believe strongly that this is best done with the use of Role Players and micro-scenarios. Putting the decision to fire or not to fire into a context for the officer and then also lining it to the officer's alignment of their body and lastly, the decision to fire with a threat or sight focus depending on their evaluation. The Role Player needs to have the ability to create a situation where it is optimal to have threat & sight focus so the decision is made each time by the officer without knowing ahead which is optimal.
2. Once initial competency is gained over several training periods the officer is challenged to release the aimed shot at a much faster rate. This is done by showing them and then asking them to have the shifting of their eye from center mass of the target to their front sight confirmation then to shot discharge as soon as their arms have "rolled" out to their full

extension. For many officer's this will dramatically increase the speed of their fire.

3. Once competent and confident with the High Ready to fire in a far faster time period than initially able, we have the officer start to move at a speed faster than they are consciously aware of shifting their eyes to the front sight. Start this by asking them to maintain a focus on center mass of the threat and draw and fire multiple rounds.
- In our experience it will take a few repetitions of this to become comfortable and to be able to maintain their current level of recoil control.

Note: A key point we see missing in many firearms training programs is the teaching of threat identification (typically identification of the person and a weapon), then shifting the eyes to center mass of the target and presenting the firearm toward a specific point on that target. Many programs do not stress nor train in this manner, as it is very hard (if not impossible) to detect physically by an instructor. The instructor must ask specific questions to ascertain if the student is doing it. To train this well, the student must have awareness to their performance. To gain that, the technique must be presented clearly, then practiced *s-l-o-w-l-y* and very deliberately. We believe this step in our program is the reason our students have had far less occurrences of "weapon focus" and firing at the weapon and not center mass of the threat.

## Summary

- If the officer shifts their focus to their sight(s) before firing they are not utilizing the QE.
- If the sight(s) are directly in line with the line of sight and this is practiced, the body and the pistol are learning how to work together. To achieve this, you must have feedback during practice.
- We believe this feedback does not necessarily need to be live fire; and in fact, we believe that much of it must be done with technologies like unconventional

munitions and even lasers.

- We train this step "on purpose" and doing so has meant much higher performance in scenario and real encounters.

At closer distances, when the target area is larger (not a small hostage rescue shot for example) it can be faster to maintain a QE target focus. The officer's knowledge of their abilities balanced with the circumstances for the need to fire are key. To do this we need the skill of identifying a threat, orientating to it and firing with both methods to be practiced in a micro-scenario. These "final stages" of training must include Role Players who spontaneously present a threat that is best addressed with QE type fire or sighted fire. This must be a choice each time and optimally done where the officer needs to move and orientate or fire and move.

This decision-making and the linking of responses to what is perceived is the keystone for performance in the real world. Our next article in this series will talk about gaze training which is vitally important and leads us to our ultimate goal of optimal decision-making and skillful performance in real encounters. The QE is a form of "gaze training", specifically for targeting tasks.

We will end with a quote from a mentor whose resume of training and experience is as impressive as they come. His thoughts on this concept are;

"Look for, through or at the sights depending on the level of accuracy needed weighed against the speed of engagement needed. Your personal limits must be practiced and known before an incident." – Rick Furr (Ret.)

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## ILEETA

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