**The Third Thought**

By Tim J. Cain

When you awake each morning, what is your first thought? Your first thought should be to give thanks that you live in the United States of America, still the finest society in the history of our planet despite its current problems.

What is your second thought? It should be to appreciate the family that you have, who support you through the ups and downs of the crazy profession of law enforcement.

Your third thought may be the most important by far. You should ask yourself, what can I do today to be a better officer tomorrow?

Criminal law enforcement is a dynamic, ever-changing occupation and the demands on individual officers constantly grows. As professionals, we have an obligation to deliver the best service possible to the public, which in turn requires advancement in our knowledge and skills. As guardians of the innocent, it is our pride that drives us to be the best we can be. The officer who believes he knows it all, that he has reached his maximum potential, should turn in his badge and find another job; he has just become a liability to himself, his department, and the public.

Your day-to-day professional development need not be extensive or in-depth, as in attending a week long training seminar, but do something. At the very least, check equipment functionality. When was the last time you field stripped and lubed your back-up weapon? Or, asked another way, when is a good time for your back-up weapon to fail? “Never” you say? What about flashlight batteries or checking the oil in your patrol vehicle. Our equipment protects us only when we protect our equipment.

Time is never wasted on physical training. Get out and jog for some cardio and endurance. Hit the weights for strength training. Get with a partner and work on physical tactics or handcuffing for skills training.

Don’t feel like engaging in physical activity? Expand your knowledge base. New criminal cases and statutes change daily. Keep up to date on changes in the law to become a more effective officer. You may decide to catch up on professional magazines for tactical tips. Why not explore non-law enforcement topics? For example, review grammar and punctuation for use in case reports and testifying, review first aid principles, study new criminal psychology articles, brush up on foreign language phrases, or a myriad of other options that touch on your duties on the street.

Do more, think more, prepare more than your opponent to succeed. And, if you’re going to lose to your opponent, it should be because he was better than you, not because you were worse than him.