

Competence, What is it?

by Alf Del-Brocco



There are 4 levels of Competence. Being Competent in anything, whether it be a sporting goal, personal or financial goal, your work, family, pigeon racing or being on the board or committee of a club, all require a different level of proficiency, but more importantly, an understanding of the process of how to attack a particular endeavor and do it well. By this, I mean, being totally Competent in doing your job or a set task well. Too often, we can see individuals who have the time and desire to participate or lend their time to a particular endeavor or position in a Club, but not necessarily and quite often, do not have the Competence in doing that job well. Usually it is “*the blind leading the blind*” through no fault of their own, other than their life skills not preparing them for a particular task, and before they know it, they have immersed themselves into the position that they are ill prepared for.

The first level is called **Conscious Incompetence**. Knowing that you know nothing, for example, about pigeon racing but are willing to “*get your feet wet*” and give it a go. You read all the books and magazines that you can get your hands on. You hang around other fancier’s lofts, admiring their birds & listening intently to any advice they may share with you. You spend hours on the Internet searching for anything on pigeon racing and downloading information that you think is pertinent to your circumstances within your new hobby. You ask questions to the “*top flyers*” in your Club, taking in any advice, which you will sort out whether it was “*B.S.*” or not, later on.

The second level is called **Unconscious Incompetence**. This is where a fancier, after winning a few club and section races, begins to think that they know all there is about pigeon keeping and pigeon racing. After all, they have done well as a novice in their club and section. There peers congratulate them on clock reading night and on basketing evenings, these same individuals scurry to handle your birds. Everyone forgot that pigeon racing is all about loft position, the prevailing weather conditions over the race and all the other factors that dictate the outcome of a race. As for a “*club official*”, unconscious incompetence sets in after the first club, section or federation meeting. The meeting proceeds with decorum, agendas are discussed and voted on and the meeting ends. This same procedure now unfolds every month for the remainder of the season and everyone believes they have done a “*marvelous*” job.

The third level is called **Conscious Competence**. Sadly, only ever a few individuals perform at this level in pigeon racing. They consciously know that pigeon racing is a 365-day a year hobby and the bird’s welfare need to be addressed on a daily basis to stay at the top and have ones birds perform consistently. These individuals know when to push their birds, when to back off the birds roadwork, when to alter the feed according to the weather conditions predicted over the week. These same individuals know what races their birds will be sent to and in what motivating condition they will be sent 12 months out from the selected race. You will often read about these individuals in the pigeon magazines and view in awe the professional setup of their lofts, homes and day-to-day activities. From an administration point of view, the new club official recognizes the current state of affairs of her club. They set a goal both verbal and written and they then seek out likeminded, intelligent people to work with. They research and discuss the pros and cons of achieving the set goal, and they achieve the goal within the deadline that they set for themselves.

The fourth area is called **Unconscious Competence**. You may have read about these individuals or seen them on television. Everything they touch “*turns to gold*”. They understand that their life and its

outcomes depend on the quality time spent with likeminded individuals. They understand that what you read, listen to and watch will affect your performance because your mind is continuously absorbing the data of your surroundings. They seek out positive people who are skilled in the field they want to improve in. They do not spend time with people who drag them down and they do not compare themselves with people who demonstrate low standards.

I will give you another set of examples from which you will be able to see the parallels. Understanding the 4 levels of Competency can help you determine the level at which you may be performing and how to go about improving oneself to a higher level.

As you know, I have been a self-defence and conflict resolution coach for 24 years. Even after 24 years of seeking out knowledge and information from the most highly qualified experts I could find and standing 10th in direct line to the original source, I keep myself in-check with reality by always reminding myself that I am just a student, "*a small fish in a big pond.*" Too often, I see new students go from the first level of competency, Conscious Incompetence through to Unconscious Incompetence. Very rarely do many students reach the final two stages within a system, that of Conscious Competence and Unconscious Competence.

When students seek training in a martial art, they are usually what are called Consciously Incompetent. They realize they cannot handle themselves in a violent confrontation. Often after training for a short period of time, students develop Unconscious Incompetence that is they still cannot handle themselves in a violent confrontation, but they think they can. Surviving a violent encounter in a non-regulated environment is exceptionally difficult. I have trained many students, over the years, to participate in boxing and kickboxing tournaments, mixed martial art and wrestling tournaments (regulated environment). I have even watched amateur and professional kickboxers put on a pair of shorts and a pair of gloves and "*have a go*". However, I find great amusement in the on-lookers of these events, many just observers, who also are Unconsciously Incompetent in viewing the event. Nevertheless, the bottom understanding here is that it is just a sporting event. There will be a winner and a loser. The fittest of the two participants, regardless of skill level, ultimately is always the winner. Fear and conflict resolution in a non-regulated environment is a TOTALLY different ball game. Fitness will play a part, but other factors such as body cues i.e. how he looks, what he does, what he says, how he says it and your appearance i.e. the way you carry yourself, your actions, how you express yourself and the tone you use along with your training in the areas of weapons, multiple opponent scenarios, and drills addressing everything and anything in a non-regulated environment, will affect the outcome... and all of this within 30 seconds!

Putting this back into a pigeon racing scenario. The controlled environment is the loft. The performance of the birds within the loft will depend on the amount of birds per cubic air space, the temperature of the loft, the water and condition of the water and the feed. All of this can be controlled. What cannot be controlled is the weather, the predators along the route home, the terrain over which the birds choose to fly i.e. inland through valleys or over mountains or along the coast. Loft position within a Club or Section can be bought or sold i.e. move to a better location, however, poorly trained birds and birds not in their peak physical genetic condition, will not fly home fast or win regardless of loft position.

Being consciously aware at all times and striving to be competent in all areas of management of your loft, 365 days of the year is a discipline. It is as much a mental discipline as to just a physical one i.e. cleaning the lofts and tossing the birds. Becoming Consciously Competent in all areas of pigeon management and training will eventually create a psychological condition in you. That of being mentally tough to do what is necessary to achieve your goals. By creating good habits and always systematically looking to improve will eventually create the condition of Unconscious Competence. These are the elite fanciers in the sport. The ones, who clean the lofts twice a day, change and clean the water containers two to three times a day. These guys will sit quietly in the loft and observe their pigeons, mentally recording the habits of each bird.

Don't get caught in the Unconscious Incompetence level. Strive to elevate yourself in all endeavors and pursuits to the Conscious Competence level. Once here, you will eventually find yourself "*trained*" and performing always at the Unconsciously Competent level. From a club management level, seek to surround yourself with like-minded individuals. Individuals prepared to address the changes that are needed with the sport, set goals and do whatever it takes to address these goals in a logical and systematic manner. If at first you are unsuccessful, learn from your error and reassess your goal and outcome and go for it again. This is called a "*lesson*". If one only goes through the motions and repeats

the same mistake twice, it is simply a mistake. Don't get defensive when the "*finger is pointed at you*" for making a mistake. Learn the lesson and have satisfaction in still achieving your desired goal.

Next time you're at your local pigeon club or federation meeting, see if you can spot those sitting within their "*comfort zones*" within the 4 levels of Competency.