

The National Congress of Old West Shootists, Inc.

Creating the Outfit, Part I: The Basic Level

by Marlan J. Ingram

I penned my first article for The Shootist back in 1998, and I've been submitting articles on a fairly regular basis since that time. One thing that I have repeatedly stressed is the need to first develop a Persona before trying to build an outfit. In addition, I've gone into detail concerning correct clothing, armament, and accouterments. Something that has just fairly recently become clear to me, however, is that not everyone is interested in taking their impression to the most extreme degree. I've found that participants in Western Action Shooting usually fall into one of three groups. The first group consists of those people who are concerned with making sure that all of their clothing, armament, and accouterments are basic recreations of what was available during the 19th century. This group is either at this level, or constantly striving to achieve this level. The second group is comprised of those individuals who will go so far as to pick a particular Persona, and will make efforts to insure that their outfit fits their PARTICULAR Persona and impression. The third group is comprised of folks like myself who take it to an extreme degree. We not only have a Persona, but we are concerned with correct materials, colors, stitching, buttons, button holes, etc., and even go so far as to try to have a correct patina to the entire impression, and that is just for starters.

Having an understanding of these three levels of participation, I can now see clearly that a person at level three may actually seem somewhat intimidating to someone who is still working on level one. With this in mind, I want to first define each level, and then I want to address separate articles detailing what it will take a participant to achieve each level. The definitions for the three levels are as follows:

Level 1: Basic - Inhabitant of the Old West - 1865-1899

Level 2: Journeyman - Specific Persona and Impression

Level 3: Master - Advanced Living Historian.

With this article, I would like to address the requirements for Level 1, which is the basic level. My feelings are that this is a good, solid goal for every NCOWS member to achieve. I honestly see no reason why each member should not be at this level. Here is a scenario: If a new member, either new to NCOWS, or new to Western Action Shooting itself said, "Hey, I'm new at this, and I haven't picked a persona or anything like that yet, but I want to make sure that all of my basic stuff for the era is correct. What do I need, and

where do I get it?" The following is what I feel a participant needs to do to achieve the basic level.

For clothing, you need four basic items. You need footwear, which should be square-toed. If you KNOW that you want to do a later era, such as 1890s, you can go with round toe, but mind you that square toe was still in common use in the 1890s also, PLUS you can use square toe for earlier eras if you wish, so I would strongly recommend the purchase of square toe boots. Second, you will need a pair of trousers, which should NOT have zippers or belt loops. Instead, they should have suspender and fly buttons, with wool being the preferred material, although other materials are still acceptable. You will need a shirt, which should be of pullover construction, with buttons going about halfway down the front. Finally, you will need a hat, and the best advice I can give you is do NOT go to your favorite modern boot outfitter or country-western outfitter looking for a hat. Instead, you will want to start with something flat brimmed and opened crowned, until you can do further research and find a particular blocking (hat shape) that is historically correct, and works for you.

Once you have those items in place, you will need correct firearms. Colt Single Action Army revolvers are always a good choice. Uberti is the preferred manufacturer, and get bullseye ejector heads if you can. Shortly, I will give you a short list of reference books which will help you better understand some of the nuances of early vs. late model Colts. You will need a rifle, and the 1873 Winchester is always a good choice, as is the 1866 Winchester. Once again, if you KNOW that you want to do 1890s, an 1892 Winchester is fine, but just like the boots, the 1873 Winchester was still in common usage in the 1890s. You will need a good shotgun, and a good double barrel would be my first choice. Once again, just like the boots and the 1873 Winchester, if you know that you wish to do an 1890s impression, then you can consider an 1887 Lever Action Shotgun, or even an 1897 pump. However, if you have not yet picked out a persona and/or a time frame, remember an early firearm or accouterment will still work for a later impression, but the reverse is not true. Purchasing an earlier style item may save you a little grief and money in the long run.

For your revolvers, you will need correct leather gear. If you have purchased Colt Single Action Army revolvers, then Mexican Loop holsters are the most popular way to carry them. Finally, to carry your ammo around at a match, I would recommend purchasing a pair of saddlebags. If you don't want to spring for those yet, something as simple as a canvas sack will suffice. Now, I've kept this very simple, and very basic. The idea is to purchase the basic items that you need, but without going overboard. The idea is to also purchase the RIGHT clothing, armament, and accouterments the first time, so that you don't later have to replace an incorrect item. For example, if you showed up at your first NCOWS event with your new Ruger Super Blackhawk revolvers and low slung fast draw rigs, you would very quickly find that you had made a mistake, and if you still

wished to compete in NCOWS, you would now be faced with trying to sell those items (most likely at a loss) in order to get the correct items that you should have purchased in the first place.

So, now that we know what we need for the basic level, where do we get it? This is where the new participant to Western Action Shooting is often tripped up. There are a LOT of outfitters willing to sell items with claims that their goods are authentic, but unless you know specifically what to look for, how do you know whose claims are legitimate? If you don't mind, let me help take the guess work out of it for you. In this article, and in the next two parts to this article in the next issues, I want to point out sutlers with whom I have had experience who I feel offer "the right stuff." For getting started, the one that I want to point the readers to is the River Junction Trade Co. (312 Main Street, Box 275, McGregor, Iowa 52157-9172, <http://www.riverjunction.com/>). I have had the chance to examine their goods first hand, and they are also very knowledgeable about what is correct for the pre- 1900 era that we wish to portray. Their catalog no. 6 should be available soon, but let me use their catalog no. 5 (out of print) to give examples of what the new participant should purchase.

Boots (check online catalog): The online catalog gives several boot options, but the ones I would suggest are the Cavalry boots, and the cost is \$270. Please keep in mind that if you purchase a good boot for starters, and take care of them, they can last you a lifetime. However, in the next two articles, I will list other sources of boots, some of which can dip below \$200. For trousers, look on page 25 of River Junction catalog no. 5, or once again, check online. The trousers will cost from \$59 to \$74, which is a good price range. For a shirt, look on page 3 of the catalog. The one I would recommend is the one called the Frontier Shirt, and prices run from \$34 (cotton) to \$49.95 (wool). For a hat, go to page 35, and the one I would recommend is called The Scout. Purchase the Fur Felt hat for \$120. Like the boots, a hat should last you a lifetime. For leather gear, I would turn to page 44 in the catalog, and purchase the Mexican Double Loop Holsters, which cost \$34.95. Believe me, this is a Very good price. For a belt, I would purchase the 2 1/2" cartridge belt on page 45, which costs \$44.95. Once again, this is a very good price, but if you want higher end leather gear, River Junction can supply that as well. Finally, there are some additional items you can purchase, although they are optional at this point. On page 8, they list vests, and I would suggest the Notched Lapel vest. On page 31, you can purchase the Narrow Tie, which costs \$19.95, and on page 33, you can purchase the Canvas Suspenders, which will run you \$15 bucks.

Once again, this is simple, basic, and to the point. It tells you exactly what you need, and where to purchase it. Without picking a specific persona, it's hard to go beyond this and pick specialty items, but achieving a Level I impression is perfectly acceptable, in my opinion. However, anyone interested in the Old West will also want to study, and may eventually want to take their impression to the next level. With that in mind, what books

should you study? When it comes to historical research, I actually have a fairly good library, but rather than recommend a truck load of books, these are the three books I would recommend for someone just embarking down this path: Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms. If it was used in the Old West, this book will have very good detail on it, including original production figures, finishes, etc. Next, I would suggest Packin' Iron. You have to put your firearms in some kind of leather, and Packin' Iron is the best one source study on the subject that I have ever seen. Finally, I would suggest The American Frontier, which will give you a lot of photos of original inhabitants of the Old West, from all walks of life.

In parting, I would like to leave you with a couple of thoughts. First, if you have attended or participated in Civil War reenacting, you are aware of the extreme degree of historical accuracy that is part and parcel of the whole affair. How do they go so far as to get EACH individual to achieve such a high degree of accuracy? Simple. Each new participant is given a list of what they need, and is also given recommendations on what to purchase. In other words, the individual is not left "blind" but is given guidance from those who have gone before. This is exactly what I've tried to do with this article. (Editor's note: if you're a Civil War reenactor you already have almost everything you need to participate in NCOWS as a recently discharged soldier gone West.) Second, I want to tell you a funny little story. A couple of years ago, I got into Revolutionary War reenacting, but I actually met the group online, through their website. So, I was joining, WITHOUT them actually seeing me. Well, prior to joining, I did INTENSE research, and I also listened to their recommendations concerning where to purchase items. The rest of my accouterments I made by hand, but followed original examples. Before I went to my first meeting with them, I had put together the ENTIRE outfit, down to the most minute detail. One of the members picked me up at my house to take me to the meeting, and had a chance to see my outfit first hand. Well, when he later introduced me to the head of the outfit (the Lieutenant) he told the Lieutenant that I had already purchased my gear. The Lieutenant then told me "Well, when you get into it a little more, let me know, and I will make you a cartridge pouch like this one." The member then told him, "No, I don't think you understand, he is finished, he has everything, and it's all correct." The Lieutenant then said, "Oh," and stood staring at me in surprise for a few moments. Why, you ask? Because a new participant to reenacting, especially serious reenacting, such as Civil or Rev War, is NOT expected to start out with a complete, advanced outfit.

Just as it is with Rev War and Civil War, a new participant to Western Action Shooting is not expected to start out with an advanced outfit. Such is almost unheard of. There should be a basic, starting level of outfitting, and that is what I have tried to address with this article. For those who wish to take it further, however, we will address that in the next issue when we discuss the requirements for "Level 2: Journeyman Specific Persona and Impression."

The National Congress of Old West Shootists, Inc.

Creating the Outfit, Part II: Journeyman Level

by Marlan J. Ingram

Before getting into the specifics of putting together a Level II outfit, let's do a brief recap of a Basic Level I Impression. At the Basic Level, you are simply an Inhabitant of the Old West, of the period from 1866 to 1899, and your goal is to simply have items that were available and commonly in use in that time frame. These items include footwear, trousers, a shirt, a hat, and we also discussed armament and leather gear. In addition, we also listed specifically where to purchase items, and the approximate cost of each item. I am of the opinion that this is a worthwhile goal for all NCOWS participants, and it should also be easy and simple to achieve.

However, for those who wish to go further, we will now discuss what is necessary to achieve a Level II Impression, which is defined as a Specific Persona and Impression. The thing that may surprise you about a Level II Impression is that, like Level I, Level II is also very easy and simple to achieve. To achieve a Level II impression, all you need to do is follow this five-step guideline:

Step 1: Pick a Persona

Step 2: Narrow the era

Step 3: Find dated photographs that fit era that you picked in step 2.

Step 4: Find non-fiction background material (books) specific to persona picked in step 1.

Step 5: Find an outfitter that carries items similar to those found in step 3.

So, to begin with in Step 1, we have to decide who we are. This doesn't have to be a detailed persona, not at this point. As the majority of participants to our sport try to identify with the cowboy way of life, we will say that our persona in step one is that of a cowboy. Ok, but what era? Once again, this does not have to be detailed to a specific year, so let's say that we are a cowboy in the 1880s. As to Step 3, let's use one of the books that we utilized as part of our Basic Level, *The American Frontier*.

Now, if we are to be a cowboy in the 1880s, what we need to do is find actual photos of cowboys that are dated to the 1880s. Simply put, we open the book, and start flipping pages, and mind you, we are looking for DATED photographs, and we are looking for common denominators. What do we find? On pages 196, 197, and 198, you see several photos of cowboys out in the field, with 'references' to 1880s, but no verified dates, so let's see what common denominators we find here, file them away, and go on. Long sleeve shirts, buttoned at the wrist and throat, bandanas, and several with suspenders. Pg. 200

gives an actual photograph of the early Shotgun style chaps, and the following pages give good photographs also, but not until page 217 do we get to a dated photograph, circa 1886, although curiously the men in the photo are not wearing bandanas. Page 220 also gives a photograph that is dated, circa 1885, and it gives a good view of a period Mexican Loop holster. Page 221 gives a photo of a couple of cowboys, and although the photos is undated, it still illustrates shirts buttoned at the throat and wrists, and shotgun style chaps. Page 242 is a circa 1884 photo (but not verified by the way it's captioned). So, we've got photos from the book dated 1884, 1885, and 1886, but to be honest with you, I'm not satisfied with that, so let's go to Step 4.

In Step 4, we find non-fictional books that are SPECIFIC to the impression we wish to recreate, so we will utilize two, *I See by Your Outfit*, and *Cowboys & The Trappings of the Old West*. Starting in *I See by Your Outfit*, we will do the same as we did with the previous book, we will open it, start flipping pages, and see what we find. Page 16 shows a circa 1884 photo of a cowboy, but in this case a foreman, so although his clothing is not gaudy or fancy, it is of fairly high grade. Page 17 shows a circa 1884 photo of another foreman, and his clothing, armament, and accouterments are also of very decent quality. Page 18 shows another cowboy, circa 1884, but whereas neither of the foremen in the photos on page 16 and 17 wear chaps, we see that this 'working' cowboy sports chaps, and unlike the foremen, does NOT sport a vest. Speaking of vests, page 19 illustrates a large group of cowboys, and we notice that some wear vests, and some do not, and as we noticed in *The American Frontier*, some wear suspenders. Another interesting photo is on page 56. It is a circa 1884 photo, and the cowboys in the photo all wear shirts buttoned to at the wrist and throat, and sport Mexican Loop Holsters for their Colt revolvers. Page 59 shows a circa 1881 photo of a cowboy, who is sporting Shotgun style chaps, and his revolver is still worn 1870s style, butt forward, and in what appears to be a California Pattern holster. Page 60 shows another cowboy, circa 1884, once again with the shirt worn in the common fashion, and once again sporting Shotgun style chaps. Page 63 shows a circa 1882 photo, and once again, shirts are worn in the common fashion, Shotgun style chaps are in evidence, and in this photo, all of the men are wearing vests, although they each appear to be dressed in their best, not in 'field' dress.

Now, *I See by Your Outfit* is quite good, and you can find many more photos in the book not only depicting the men, but their armament and accouterments as well. If we go to *Cowboys & the Trappings of the Old West*, the photography is even better, but I will only mention a few. On page 10 is a circa 1880 photo, and you will notice that each of the men once again subscribe to the common fashion of wearing shirts buttoned at the wrist and throat, although only one is wearing a vest in the photo. As far as armament is concerned, you will notice once again that the Mexican Loop and Colt revolver is the most common combination. Page 52 shows a cowboy circa 1880s, and once again we see the

shirt worn in the common fashion, but this time with a bandana, with the common Shotgun style chaps, and with the common Mexican Loop holster.

Cowboys & the Trappings of the Old West, and I See by Your Outfit are both good books, and if you wish to portray a cowboy of the 1880s, I would urge getting and studying both of them. In addition, I would look for any period non-fiction book that deals with the specifics of day to day life of cowboys of the era. Once you have paged through each of these books, and noticed pages with photos of cowboys, and or with clothing and accouterments, I would simply write down where I found each photo, as well as the date of the photo or the accouterment, and I would file it away in a notebook.

So, did we get common denominators from the photos? Yes. We see that the clothing we purchased for our Basic Level I impression will still work for this impression, all we need to do is build on it. To do that, we simply pay attention to the common denominators, which show shirts buttoned at the wrist and throat, we see that suspenders are sometimes worn, and we see that vests are also sometimes worn, but are not mandatory. The same goes with the bandana. If we get chaps, we want them to be of the Shotgun style, and a Mexican Loop holster would have been the most common way of carrying our revolver at the time. So, proceeding to Step 5, it is a simple (and frustrating) matter to find an outfitter who can provide you with the basic items that you found in your research. As was stated in the first article, there are many vendors willing to sell you items that didn't exist and simply are not representative of the era. As a starting point, we can once again go with River Junction Trade Company (312 Main Street, McGregor, IA 52157, 866-259-9172, <http://www.riverjunction.com/>), who can provide you with all of the items needed to complete the above impression. Another outfitter I would like to mention is The Great Plains Hat Company (2245 Franklin St., Bellevue, Nebraska 68005, 402-292-6018). There are two things you need to know about The Great Plains Hat Company. First, their items are not cheap. Second, I believe they make the absolute best product available. I've had the opportunity to examine their hats first hand, and I must say that I am IMPRESSED. As far as other outfitters are concerned, I'm going to contact Red River Trade Co. Red River Trade Co., (1491 120th St., Earlham, IA 50072, 515-360-6679) regarding their wares, and I hope to have a report on their offerings by next issue, as well as those offered by James Country Mercantile (111 N. Main St., Liberty, MO 64068, 816-781-9473, <http://www.jamescountry.com/>).

As you can see, creating a Level II, Journeyman impression is quite simple. It costs no money to come up with a persona and era, and even the research can be conducted for free, simply by utilizing your local library. Compiling the documentation is simply a matter of writing down and saving what you find. As I said, it is quite simple, it is simply a matter of doing it.

Now for those who wish to take it further and who want something more intensive, in the next issue we will detail what it takes to put together a Level III: Master- Advanced Living Historian impression.

The National Congress of Old West Shootists, Inc.

Creating the Outfit, Part III: The Master Level by Marlan J. Ingram

Zeke Proctor was a Cherokee, a member of the Keetoowah Society (Full Bloods) of the Cherokee Nation, and a Union Veteran of the War Between the States. He was also a noted gunman, and was described (and photographed) as carrying two revolvers, and was known to be proficient with both the Spencer Repeating carbine and the Winchester rifle. In April of, 1872, Zeke Proctor found himself on trial in the Cherokee Nation for an accidental killing two months before. Unfortunately, the woman killed was a Beck, who's family were not only Confederate Veterans of the War Between the States, but also political rivals of Proctor and his supporters. Among the Five Civilized Tribes, the Cherokee Nation included, it was custom that if you harmed an individual, you could expect that person's family members to seek satisfaction for the transgression. The stage was set for a reprisal.

To avoid trouble, the trial was moved from the regular courthouse (which was in Beck country) to the Whitmire schoolhouse, with Judge Blackhawk Sixkiller presiding. The trial began on April 15, 1872, and the Proctor faction, including the defendant himself, were armed to the teeth, and in addition, had several Cherokee Lighthorse Police on hand to protect the proceedings. The Beck faction, however, had sworn out Federal Warrants to arrest not only Zeke Proctor, but also proctor's family, the Judge, and even the Jury! To assist in this, the Beck faction had along two Deputy U.S. Marshals who had specific instructions to make arrests only if Proctor were acquitted.

The Beck faction had no intention of arresting anyone, and simply stormed into the packed, makeshift courthouse and started shooting. During the frenzied melee, eleven men were killed, including Zeke's brother Johnson, Zeke's defense Attorney, and Deputy Marshall J.G. Owens. The balance of those killed, however, were on the Beck side, who made good their escape, leaving their dead behind. The number of wounded was large, and to this day has not been accurately recorded, but included among the wounded were Zeke Proctor, and even the Judge himself. Undaunted, the proceedings were continued the next day, and Zeke Proctor was acquitted. However, the Beck's were not satisfied, and persisted in trying to bring Zeke to 'justice', until President U.S. Grant granted complete Federal Amnesty to Zeke Proctor.

As I've stated in past articles, I find the Transition-Era (1866-1876) to be the most fascinating period in the Old West, and I find the Indian Territories to be the most

fascinating area. To put it mildly, the time and place were both wild as could be, as the above story illustrates. I've long since settled on this time and place as the basis for my persona and impression, and I've put in a lot of time and effort into researching and acquiring the correct items for a proper portrayal. Admittedly, I go into various details within my impression that are far beyond anything that NCOWS requires. The basic intent of being so fanatical about the minute details of my impression is that I want to go, as much as is *reasonably* possible, as far as I can go with my impression. I refer to this level as the Master Level.

The definition of the Master Level is Advanced Living Historian. The goal is to portray the era so completely that anyone looking to find fault with your impression will literally have to *work* to do so. If someone comes up to me and says, "If you give me several minutes, I bet I can find a flaw in your impression", well, I would be satisfied with that statement, even if they eventually did find a flaw. The idea is to be so complete in detail that nothing immediately (or upon secondary inspection) stands out as incorrect in the portrayal. How do you achieve this? For starters, we will use the following seven step guideline:

1. Pick a *detailed* Persona

2. Pick a specific year as cut-off

3. Take a black and white photo in your current outfit

4. Self-Check: You will need three things; the photo you just took, a book with period photos illustrating the time and era of your persona, and some blunt honesty. Utilizing these things, change and upgrade those items of your outfit which obviously stand out as not being correct for the era.

5. Retake black and white photo of upgraded outfit.

6. Using the upgraded photo, find period photographs/catalogs to document EVERY item that is visible in your black and white photo.

7. As a final step, use your upgraded black and white photo, and allow others to view it and look for flaws. If no flaws are found, then you have achieved the Master Level.

For the Journeyman level that we discussed last month, all you needed to do for your Persona was pick a period occupation, and a year. As an example, for the Journeyman level you could be a Cowboy of the 1880s, and you are done. For the Master level, however, the Persona needs to be detailed, so here is mine as an example:

The year is 1875, and I am an Assistant Creek Lighthorseman of the Muskogee district, working out of Marshalltown, I.T. (Indian Territory/Oklahoma). Since this is a part time position, I also supplement my small income by working part time as a stagecoach guard. I have operated in these positions for four years.

Originally, I was a slave in the Creek Nation, but upon receiving emancipation, I was adopted as a full member of the Creek Nation. I enlisted in the 9th. Cavalry Buffalo

soldiers, and served five turbulent, bloody years in Texas. My duties included not only chasing Comanches and outlaws, but also building forts, roads, repairing telegraph wire, guarding stage coaches and valuable government shipments, and of course, guarding citizens.

Upon my discharge in 1871, I returned to Indian Territory, and was elected to membership in the Lighthorse. This was quite appropriate, given my experience in the Buffalo Soldiers. The Assistant status means that I am called out in times of great strife (or special circumstances), and at that point, I am given full authority to handle such situations in any way I (we) see fit.

Ok, so this is the Persona, and it also satisfies step 2, which is picking a specific year. Once those things are accomplished, it is simply a matter of moving onto step 3 and 4 to make sure that EVERY item fits. If every item doesn't fit, then you proceed to 5. If every item DOES fit, then you proceed to step 6, and you PROVE it. As an example, my trousers are documented to an original pair circa 1863 (Arms & Equipment of the Confederacy – pg. 131 – Civilian manufacture). My shirt is documentable to 1865 (Thoughts on Men's Shirts in America - pgs. 39-50). However, I go even further. For example, my buttons are documented to the 1860s, and so are my button holes. My bowtie is also documented to the 1860s, and even the fact that my suspenders are worn exposed is documented. My Spurs are not only originals, but are documented to the period 1840-70 (Historic American Spurs, illustration CV 34, pg. 22). Even my early style spur straps are documentable to the 1860s. Do you see where I am going with this? The idea is that you can go to step 7, submit your photo to someone, and tell them to find something out of place. If your documentation is up to snuff, if someone finds something they don't think fits, you should be able to open up your documentation and show them that it DOES fit. If you can't do that, then you simply correct the outstanding item.

Now, if the readers are not yet convinced that I am a fanatic, let me confirm it as we take it further. When attending matches, I carry a pair of saddlebags (documented) for my ammunition, etc. In the last issue when discussing the Journeyman Level, I stated that Cheyenne Pioneer Products cartridge boxes were a good way to go. For the Master Level, such boxes would need to be upgraded. Simply put, I reproduced (as closely as I could) the original style labels that were first introduced with the Richard's Conversion Colt .44 revolver, even to the point of trying to duplicate the original color (yellow). I've duplicated period (1860s) wrapping for my shotgun cartridges, my Spencer ammunition is in original style boxes, as is the ammunition labeled 'Improved Henry' for my 1866 Winchester Carbine.

As I stated earlier, such attention to detail goes beyond anything that NCOWS requires. However, there are a fair number of members in NCOWS who take their impression to this level. When shooting with the Great Lakes Freight and Mining Co. earlier this year, I noted that Adam Huber, who does a Confederate Guerrilla impression,

did so to the most minute detail. His percussion 1851 Navy revolvers were in period holsters, and not only was he shooting a Spencer Carbine, but his ammunition was in period Spencer style cartridge boxes! However, I also noticed several other participants at Great Lakes Freight and Mining Co. with period ammunition boxes. I thought that was excellent, and I was very impressed. At the same match, I met James Hunt, who's outfit was unquestionably correct, and he allowed me to look through his personal documentation booklet. I've also talked with other NCOWS members who also have taken the time to put together not only a complete impression, but to have each item documented in an easily portable folder or booklet.

Does everyone NEED to go this far? No, but this is why I've suggested the various levels of authenticity. Within NCOWS, we all understand that authenticity is the basis of our organization. However, the degree that each of us wants to take authenticity varies from person to person. Some operate at a basic level, whereas others like me take it to an extreme degree. In discussing a new class earlier this year, it became evident that there was a rift between those who wanted a higher level of authenticity, and those who thought a basic level was sufficient. The thing is, NCOWS is a small organization. We can't AFFORD a rift. The organization needs to be inclusive of all individuals who are willing to follow the basic, minimum guidelines, but it also needs to let those folks who want to take it higher know that there is a place for them in the organization also. We can all exist under one umbrella, and as I stated in an earlier article, I am of the opinion that operating at the Basic level is sufficient. I simply take it higher because that is what I personally want to do.

In addition, I've heard several people, especially new members and prospective members, state that they didn't know clearly what the NCOWS concept of authenticity really was. With this in mind, having clearly defined levels, and letting folks know that ALL of the levels are acceptable and welcome, may alleviate some of concerns of the new and prospective members. Finally, I hope that I have demystified the concept of authenticity. It is fairly easy to achieve a basic level by following simple steps and guidelines, and for those of us who wish to take it further, the sky is the limit.