
Dry Shooting: The Secret of Good Marksmanship

*[From Psycho-Cybernetics
by Maxwell Maltz, pages 211-212]*

A novice on the pistol range will quite often find that he can hold the hand gun perfectly still and motionless, as long as he is not trying to shoot. When he aims an empty gun at a target, his hand is steady. When the same gun is loaded and he attempts to make a score - "purpose tremor" sets in. The gun barrel uncontrollably moves up and down, back and forth, in much the same way that your hand tremors when you attempt to thread a needle.

Almost to a man, all good pistol coaches recommend lots of "dry run" target shooting, to overcome this condition. The marksman calmly and deliberately aims, cocks and snaps the hand gun at a target on the wall. Calmly and deliberately he pays attention to just how he is holding the gun, whether it is canted or not, whether he is squeezing or jerking the trigger. He learns good habits calmly. There is no purpose tremor because there is no over-carefulness, no over-anxiety for results. After thousands of such "dry runs," the novice will find that he can hold the loaded gun, and actually shoot it while maintaining the same mental attitude, and

going through the same calm, deliberate physical motions.

A friend of mine learned to shoot quail in much the same manner. A good shot on the skeet range, the roar of a quail as it took off and his anxiety for results, or over-motivation, cause him to miss almost every time. On his next hunt, he carried an empty shotgun the first day. There was no need to get excited, because he couldn't shoot anyway. No need for over-motivation when you're carrying an empty gun! He "shot" some twenty quail that day with the empty gun. By the time he had made his first six shots all anxiety and jitteriness had left him. His companions thought he had lost a few of his buttons. But he redeemed himself the next day when he killed his first 8 birds, and got a total of 15 quail out of 17 shots.

A New Idea for Level 1 Technical

Jean-Francois Senecal reports that the classroom portions of the Quebec Level 1 Technical course (Rifle and Pistol combined) is conducted on a Friday and a Saturday. Then on Sunday, the coach is required to bring an athlete and actually coach an athlete on the line. (The coach does not necessarily work with the athlete s/he brought.) The course conductors then deal only with the

coaches, and not the athletes, during this training session.

Holding...

One author has suggested that rifle coaches stop referring to the balancing of the rifle in the sling or the shooter's arms as "the hold", because it conjures up exactly the wrong image in the shooter's mind. The rifle is not "held" in the active way that word suggests.

A case in point: I was working with a junior last summer who was new to using a sling in the prone position. Rather than resting the weight of the rifle into the sling, he was "holding" the rifle with muscle tension in his arms. He was, unfortunately (and this is common), kinesthetically unaware of the muscle he was using.

In order to make his muscles report properly to his brain, I used a simple technique. With the shooter in position, and "fully relaxed", according to him, I applied downward pressure on the balance point of the rifle, and slowly increased the amount of pressure until I felt the muscles "give" and relax. "There," I said to the shooter, "did you feel that?" He said that he did, and then he understood in his muscles (not just his brain) the difference between "holding" and letting the sling do its job.

O Say Can You See?

One of the discussions at the Toronto Level 3 Technical course centered on a coach's problem with a promising junior who was so determined to make every shot exactly right that he was over-holding. We all agreed that this would not produce good shooting in the long run, for a variety of reasons. But what the coach needed was a single convincing argument to change the shooter's behavior. The group chose vision.

The coach was advised to have the shooter look towards a bright light for a couple of seconds and then look away to a neutral or dark area. The burned-in image on the retina should be apparent. Then the coach would explain that afterimages such as this can be thought of as the temporary bleaching out of the photo-retinal cells. (The area on the retina that was activated by the bright light retains that sharp image while the adjacent areas are not bleached and seem dark by contrast.)

This is what happens when the shooter looks at the sight picture overly long. The afterimage of the sight picture is what the eye continues to see, even when the real (current) sight picture has changed. Worse yet for precision shooting, the afterimage moves when the eye moves... independent of any movement in the hold! Most elite shooters look

away from the sight picture every few seconds, during the hold. The shooter who needs to hold the position for a long time to marshal his courage to fire probably needs more than this to overcome the underlying problems, but at least this is a start, and one bad habit can be broken.

The Puppies...

One of our junior shooters was having trouble dismissing irrelevant thoughts from his mind. I told him a little secret that I have used to disperse these intrusions, without getting frustrated. I picture each little thought as a sweet little puppy... like little puppies, they are often undisciplined and irresistible... and like puppies, they need persistent but gentle correction. With this technique, I find it easy to pick the thought-puppies up and put them away in their basket... and then continue my target shooting with a tolerant smile on my face.

Course Conductors

The Course Conductor Manual for Level 1 Technical (Rifle) has been revised. The manual is not in general circulation, but is available (from the SFC) to those who ask for an upgrade.

More to It... Than Meets The Eye!

In a book called Out of Sight into Vision (Cohen/Shapiro), the following exercise is suggested for good visual hygiene:

Indoors or outdoors, with your eyes open wide look towards an object not at it. Become conscious of the background of the object. This will prevent you from directing all your visual energy to one specific spot in space. Masters in the martial arts (kung fu, karate) look beyond. By looking at an object in a defocused, non-central way, it seems to assume a more powerful and controlled image.

Do any of you coaches out there have information applicable to target shooting on this subject?

References In This Issue:

Maltz, Maxwell: Psycho-Cybernetics. Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc., New York, NY.

Cohen, Neville S. and Shapiro, Joseph L.: Out of Sight Into Vision. Collier MacMillan Canada Ltd., Don Mills, Ontario.

Feature Article

by Peter Crawshay

Peter Crawshay is a Level 2 Coach, working on his Level 3 Practical. He faces the disadvantages of sparse populations and long distances that many Canadian Coaches face. Peter worked as an official at the National Rifle Championships and the Commonwealth Games this past summer. At the Nationals, he noticed that one of the little leather tiebacks on my shooting jacket was occasionally popping forward and smacking my cheek while I was shooting prone... he tucked the ties back on themselves to hold them in place so they wouldn't distract me while I was shooting... a very little thing, but details like that can make a difference!

In this article, Peter has accumulated a wide variety of goals statements, conveniently organized under six goal categories. If you and your shooters find it difficult to come up with goals that aren't outcome-oriented (like scores, placings, medals, etc.), here's a selection of goals statements to consider!

Goals For a Competitive Shooter

Commitment + Clear Goals + Action over Time = Good Results

With a set of clear goals shooters will have a guide to follow as they work towards good results and shooting success. Following are a list of goals that competitive shooters could include in their own list of goals.

After one or two seasons a competitive shooter should be aware of or working at a beginning level on most of these goals. Mastery of these goals will take a competitive shooter many years of training and probably require the help of a Level 2 or 3 coach.

Goal 1 - **The shooter** **is developing** **a training program.**

1. Sets goals for each

component of the annual training program:

- a. Mental
 - b. Physical
 - c. Technical
 - d. Tactical
2. Regularly sets, evaluates, and adjusts goals
 3. Maintains a shooting diary
 - a. Uses diary to record information
 - b. Uses previous diary entries to set goals for present training session
 - c. Uses diary as a means to problem-solve

Goal 2 - **The shooter** **is developing** **positive attitudes.**

1. Practices regularly and has a positive attitude towards shooting
2. Co-operates with other members of the team
3. Is open to constructive discussion and analysis
4. Practices safe rifle handling and follows the range control rules

Goal 3 - **The shooter** **is developing** **good mental skills.**

1. Uses positive thinking and positive self talk
2. Uses deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation techniques

3. Uses mental imagery
4. Is improving ability to concentrate
5. Remains focused during training or competition
6. Uses stress management techniques

**Goal 4 -
The shooter
is becoming
physically fit.**

1. Maintains a regular aerobic program
2. Maintains a regular weight training program
3. Maintains a regular flexibility program
4. Maintains a healthy diet
5. Regularly does a warm up before shooting and a cool down afterwards
6. Uses specific stretches during shooting to relieve tension
7. Minimizes the use of stimulants or depressants

**Goal 5 -
The shooter
is developing
good technical skills.**

A. Basics

1. Uses techniques to reduce the effects of pulse (e.g.,

- clothing, body placement)
2. Uses body structure to support the rifle
 3. Builds each position around its center of gravity
 4. Consistently has a good hold (e.g. for rifle, butt-shoulder, cheek and grip pressure)
 5. Uses follow through
 6. Can evaluate the position and make necessary changes for improvement
 7. Is developing the semi-conditioned responses of sway compensation and breath, eye, and trigger control
 8. Has a consistent pattern when firing a string of shots

B. Equipment Adjustment

1. Positions rifle to achieve proper head placement
2. Uses correct stock length to ensure a good position
3. Uses a sling correctly
4. Selects best front and rear sight apertures
5. Adjusts sights correctly (horizontal, vertical)
6. Maintains the same eye relief when changing positions
7. Places spotting scope so position is maintained when viewing shots

C. Clothing Selection

1. Wears appropriate jacket, glove, hat, clothing, footwear and ear/eye protection

**Goal 6 -
The shooter
is developing
good tactics.**

1. Adapts training, equipment, and positions to varying environmental factors such as changes in heat, cold, humidity, precipitation, wind, light, and mirage
2. Knows basic scoring rules and what to do for cross fires or too many shots on bull, etc.
3. Plans for competitions (pre, during, post)

The above goals are related to the Rifle Shooting Level 1 and 2 Technical manuals of the National Certified Coaching Program published by the Shooting Federation of Canada. Some of the goals were adapted, in part, from Coaching Young Athletes, R. Martens, RW Christina, JS Harvey Jr., BJ Sharkey, published in Washington, DC by the National Rifle Association, 1983. See also the Coaching Theory 1, 2, and 3 manuals of the National Certified Coaching Program published by The Coaching Association of Canada and Mental Training for Shooting Success by RL Domey, published in Pullman, Washington by College Hill Communications, 1989.