

Mastering the Mental Game

Lanny Bassham Seminar

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Lanny was not the first person chosen for a team as a child. Then he heard about rifle shooting as an Olympic sport and he thought, "That's something that I can do." He picked up the sport and worked extremely hard. Subsequently, he won a Silver medal at the 1972 Munich Olympics, then a Gold at the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

Between Munich and Montreal, he talked to Olympians, learning how to win. Competitors estimate that 90% of sport is a mental game. Lanny decided to learn about performance enhancement.

Single glaring statement of highest achieving performers: "Don't try harder than necessary". They almost act as if they don't care, making it look easy. The optimal mental effort is very close to the attitude of "let's have fun".

Work ethic of Olympians: Skanaker (pistol legend) made a point at training camp about effort required by starting people off with 500 dry fire shots before classes started!

Athletes should not be looking for perfection, but for **consistency**.

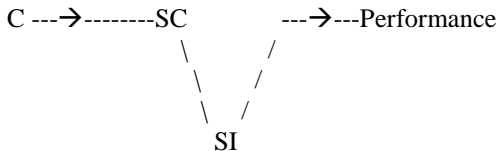
Mental toughness is winning when it counts ("I may lose 7 out of 8 matches to you, but I'm going to make that one match count.")

Performance is the function of three mental processes:

1. Conscious (C) – what you remember, think about, etc.
2. Sub-conscious (SC) – skill base, which due to training comes out automatically.
3. Self-Image (SI) – habits and attitudes that make you who you are. Comprises your upper and lower limits (scores, abilities, etc.) of what you believe that you can do. (i.e. I can shoot 525/600 almost anytime I want, and I'm happy when I shoot 535.) This range is your comfort zone and the trick is to move that zone upwards.

Through imprinting your self-image with new perceptions (subsequently changing your neuro-pathways), you can change your self-image, allowing you perform better.

Imprinting is the process of repeating and reinforcing your new self-image. This takes about 3 weeks.



The mind can only consciously think of one thing at a time: therefore, think of only positive performance. (Smooth trigger pull, energized, clear focus, concentrated)

"Whatever you think a thing to be, that's what it becomes." By allowing negative self-perceptions to exist, you predispose yourself to make excuses. So, do positive imprinting in a diary and never miss a day for imprinting!!!!

"Train so well that all performance is subconsciously done . . . Performance and self-image are always equal."

Imagination and reality are indistinguishable to the self-image. Therefore, talk positively about self and others (imprinting). Powerful imprinting changes self-image.

The biggest problem we have in performance enhancement is adopting change.

Critical Importance – To Be the Best

- 1. Find out what the best performers are doing**
- 2. Eliminate everything else from your life (drop whatever you are doing and take on the winning behavior)**

Good shooters don't win because they try too hard – that's working consciously and is not optimal. Get uncomfortable (move your comfort zone) and work hard to acquire new skills.

3 Phases of a Task

1. Anticipation Phase – getting prepared to perform
2. Action Phase – performing the task
3. Reinforcement Phase – reviewing the performance – critical for imprinting

In reinforcement phase, be positive. Work on 10s and non-10s (the focus is still on 10s, not shooting a 6 or dropping a shot. Deny the opportunity for a self-fulfilling prophecy.)

Do not imprint anything negative immediately after an action. Let the impression fade and review it later. Conversely, review and reinforce positive actions immediately when they are fresh, most vivid and the most powerful. When your performance is optimal, feast on it. Revel in the sensation of what you did so you can duplicate the sensation. If you shoot a non-10, visualize a 10 (think about that optimal moment and sensation) then move on. Remind yourself instantly about what it feels like to shoot that 10.

Want to sabotage your performance and everyone around you? Ask somebody, "How did you do?" This will open the door to negative talk as they focus on what they did wrong. Conversely, praise people on what they were doing well. Tell other people about someone else's success story. Your self-image can't tell the difference, so you will positively imprint yourself and other people at the same time. Similarly, don't talk negatively to people outside of your shooting circle. This will still result in negative imprinting.

Champions work hard in practice (training) and easy in matches. Everyone else works the other way around.

Pressure is good as it reminds us that the event is important to us. Participation in more competitions reduces match fear. So, go to matches to defeat those nerves. There is no substitute for this.

Match Strategies:

At the match, establish the mental level. Before you start physically shooting, sit down and mentally rehearse shooting well. Think of this as a mental warm up, like dry firing can be a technical warm up.

If feeling nerves, use the Fake Yawn. This action kills anxiety and results in a drop of the heart rate.

Let the shot happen: don't force it to happen. You win the event in relentless preparation, not just on the day of the event. Otherwise, you are relying on baseless luck.

Establish and shoot on a rhythm. Build a performance delivery rhythm without a pause. When you stop or pause in the execution of your shot, then you think. As you wait and think, you have a better chance of deviating from your sub-consciously ingrained plan of action (what you've been training for.) Fast or slow, establish a rhythm and stick to it.

Learn to center yourself, so anxiety will drop. Centering yourself involves:

1. Deep breathing
2. Deliberate relaxation of muscle groups (shoulders, neck, tongue, hand)
3. Center your balance over your feet

Centering is a distraction skill to pull you away from a bad experience, to move your focus off of a non-10. Centering is an activity which is something which you have absolute and easy control of – positive experience when things are not right.

Stop thinking about shooting and focus on how you breathe. The muscles that are most tense in shooting are in the neck, shoulders, tongue and upper body, so relax these muscles on purpose. Center balance over both feet. Finally, picture a perfect 10. This is the best means of recovery from a non-10.

Avoid outcome cues. As such, don't count scores. Focus on what you are doing (match plan, shot plan), so narrow the choices of acceptable thoughts during a match and the finals.

In visualization, the clarity of the image isn't important. The direction that your mind is pointed in is what is important.

Forms of Rehearsal

1. Mental practice
2. "Ultimate You" actual rehearsal
3. Contingency planning rehearsal – extremely important. This takes more time than planning for the good times. Know how to respond to "What if's."

Once again, feast on success. Initially, rehearse a 10. Take the shot, then review the shot (10 or non-10), and finally mentally rehearse a 10 before you move on.

Running a Mental Program

1. Trigger the subconscious (Hello, we're going to shoot a 10.)
2. Occupy the consciousness
3. Be duplicable
4. Best when visual rather than verbal
5. The simpler that the program is, the better.
6. Shooter specific (everyone is different but you must have a plan)

Example of a Mental Program

1. Point of initiation (i.e. loading)
2. Point of attitude (what does it feel like to shoot a 10)
3. Point of direction (rehearse lining up sights while lifting)
4. Point of control (check particular issues, i.e. range flags for wind)
5. Point of Focus (when technical action takes place – align sights and squeeze)

Have a consistent Mental (Pre-shot) Program

(Note: train a lot for the finals. US Olympic Team shoots in the first 5-10 seconds – essentially as soon as they see black.)

3 things that must be in Mental Program

1. Duplicable
2. Occupies conscious mind
3. Helps you shoot good scores

You have to be mentally UP for 10 seconds (+/-) for a shot, not all day. When the moment comes, you must be there mentally 100%!

Building Subconscious Circle

- **The Mastery Curve (not linear over time, but runs up and down over time)**
- **Training Guidelines**
- **Performance Analysis**

Performance Descents (Inevitable component of Mastery Curve)

When you go in to a performance descent (eventually we all do), the worst thing that you can do is abandon the game plan and make changes (i.e. panic.) When you find yourself in a descent, then switch to backup gun, which you have absolute faith in.

Training Principles

Build your training around principles, not around calendars. The following principles should guide your activities:

1. Principle of a Break: Shooters often shoot best just after a break. So, no heavy practices before a match.
2. Principle of Focus: Wherever you are, be all there. When you shoot, shooting should be the only thing on your mind.
3. Principle of Reinforcement: Build a base so you can take a break. This base comes from lots of shooting, close together, over an extended period of time. You know that you have this base, when during the break, you miss it. You will ache and dream to shoot.
4. Principle of the Individual: What's best for one person is not necessarily best for another individual.
5. Principle of Repetition: If the shooting is going well, then keep going and shoot a lot. Always shoot on an ascent: keep on the roll. So, when it works, keep at it. Conversely, when it stinks, walk away. Don't practice failure.

Performance Analysis

Journal (shooting diary) entry consists of:

1. Date
2. Event
3. Location
4. Time Spent
5. Diary

Components of Analysis:

1. Solution Analysis: statement of issue. "I am looking for a solution for trigger snatching." The One-Person Solution goes as follows: "The one person who can help me with trigger snatching is _____." At this point, you talk to that person and that person alone about the problem. It reduces the impact of the negative reinforcement and offers you a concrete resolution plan, reducing worry.
2. Success Analysis: review of what went well today. "What did I do well today" reinforces positive experience, imprints individual and builds better self-image.
3. Goal Statement: has three components, directing you to a future outcome:
 - a. Score Statement: "I often shoot above 540." (current comfort zone between 525 & 535)
 - b. Technique Statement: "I often shoot when my sights are aligned and crisp."
 - c. Position Statement: "I am a national pistol competitor." (Reminds you that you are somebody and going somewhere, not awed and afraid of the reigning champions.)

If you are not keeping track of your performance and thoughts, then you are liable to repeat non-peak performance.

To make the grade as a champion and shoot well, you need the gun in your hand 4-5 times a week. Anything less and you are deluding yourself.

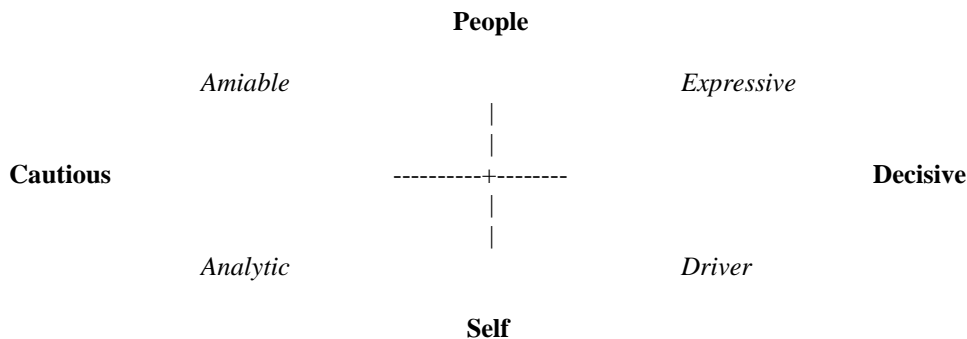
Progressive Training

1. Dry Firing or Dry Mounting – focus on position parameters: stance, point of aim, size and speed of hold (arc of movement size and speed), balance (sway) (muscular endurance, as well?)
2. Group Shooting – focus on particular technique or rhythm (lift, sight, squeeze, follow though)
3. Simulated Match – practice just like the match.

The higher the goals, the greater the importance of everything (vitamins, fitness, dry firing, etc.)

Relaxation technique: repeat to yourself – “Slow, slow, slow” – body mellows out, breathing drops, hold slows down.

Your Behavioral Style



Driver – decisive and self-reliant

- “I’ll take care of it.”
- Workaholics
- Tactless
- High personal productivity

Expressive – decisive and a people person

- talker
- expressive and excited
- wants it all and wants it now
- juggler (overload activities)
- needs focus but they are having fun
- would benefit from organization
- changes equipment and settings A LOT!

Amiable – cautious and people person

- gossips, talking to everyone
- on committees
- good delegators and volunteers
- offers praise easily
- needs to be more decisive – may talk to everyone, trying to get consensus
- hates working/training alone

Analytic – cautious and introverted (self-reliant)

- everything has a place and it better be there
- persistent and focussed
- can be boring – one track mind
- not likely to be experimental

Don't change your behavioral style: find your strengths and weaknesses and work with them. A perceived liability can be someone's greatest untapped resource/asset if they can determine what it is and put it to use.

Building Control - in control of every part of your life, in order to succeed:

1. You must control what you think about.
2. You must control what you eat. (Fruit provides energy but doesn't require any digestion, with the exception of bananas. Avoid fatty food.)
3. You must control what you say.
4. You must control your time.
5. You must control with whom you associate. (Key factors in skill, attitude, etc. Associate with good shooters (or superior, if possible) who are fanatically positive.)
6. You must control what you read, watch and listen to.

Power of Reinforcement

Transportation

Imagine what your thoughts would be if you were world champion. If you can do this and you notice a difference between your transported self and your old self, then dump old behavior and adopt transported, world champion behavior. You are as good as anyone in the room. Think this way and actualize it.

Through reinforcement (and imprinting), you can change your self-image in 21 days:

1. Be willing to change.
2. Identify habits and attitudes needed to change. (Corollary: identify what works and maintain that specific behavior.)
3. Set up new self-image that is in direct conflict with your old self-image.
4. Use directive affirmation to change your self-image.

Directive Affirmation

1. Write a short paragraph of how you will think and act.
2. Make 5 copies and place them around wherever you will see them often, while away from the range.
3. Whenever you see it: stop, read it and then visualize it.

Dealing with issues along the lines of "I used to have challenges with . . . Now I am the best."

Note: deal with problems in the past tense and reaffirm in the present tense.

Directive Affirmation Details

1. Define the habit, behavior or attitude that needs changing.
2. List the personal pay value (being the best, being a better shot, having a better hold, etc.)
3. Outline the plan. Define the components of change.
4. Write the directive affirmation.

Only run one at a time. Subsequently, one a month results in 12 changes over the year and the best Lanny has heard of was 6. The directive affirmation results in intensive action if it is done right. Most importantly, don't think about the old way. Don't give yourself excuses to wimp out.

Keys of Success

1. Time
2. Money
3. Effort
4. People – this is the hardest component to acquire for success. Somebody must be there for you. You will never get anywhere without them. Hold on to them and reward them for granting your success.