

Confidence

Confidence—a ten-letter word suggesting a critical concept in shooting: Believe in yourself. An accomplished pistol shooter once told me that if I could patent a method to teach shooters confidence, I could quit my day job and live off the royalties. Despite that exaggeration, more often than not, shooters who have a high level of confidence are often the ones ascending the podium for the gold, silver, or bronze.

How can you develop that level of confidence? Unfortunately, there is no secret or trick to gaining confidence. Rather, it develops as a result of sound training methods, focused efforts to produce positive outcomes, and years of experience. Dynasties are not built overnight—they begin with careful planning, clearly established goals, strategies to accomplish those goals, and hard, hard work. When you first picked up a pistol, did you shoot straight 10s? No—like all other athletes, your skills will develop with time, experience, and hard work.

You may be confident, but do you really believe in yourself? Make your mental dialogue come alive by acknowledging your talents and accomplishments—likely achieved through hard work and goal setting—then repeat those motivational words to yourself incessantly. Baseball great Yogi Berra said, “Baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical.” Though

long after he had sustained his injury. Interestingly enough, the son walked with the same gait as his father. As a young child, he looked up to his dad as a role model and followed his example. Watch other great shooters and imitate some of their techniques or methods. Some may work for you, increase your confidence, and improve your results. Of course, you should adopt and perfect the techniques that suit you best. You certainly don’t want to “limp” along in your shooting, but you can make great strides by adopting the sound fundamentals and techniques that build skill and confidence.

While proper training is a key element in a shooter’s confidence, experience is also a necessary element. Does this mean that our most seasoned pistol shooters feel no pressure in the final of a World Cup? Not at all. Their experience gave them opportunities to channel their emotions in a positive way. Though it may be typical to entertain negative thoughts in a stressful competitive environment, prepare yourself to foster a positive outlook with each match so that you become more and more comfortable and confident in those exciting situations. Whenever possible, participate in any and all the matches you can. Those experiences are opportunities to develop your mindset and confidence in match settings. You’ll gain insights and knowledge about the peculiarities of a match

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Yogi needed a little work on his math, his suggestion that athletic pursuits involve mental control can easily be applied to shooting. Techniques such as visualization and positive self-reinforcement are helpful ways to gain confidence. For example, when practicing your lift and hold in front of the mirror, visualize the shot and the ten. Tell yourself that you can shoot tens—out loud.

First and foremost, believe in the power of your mind. Your mental strength and toughness—and not simply your age or experience—are they keys to accomplishing great feats. That mental ability, along with dedication and focus on your goals, will lead you to achieve amazing results. Believe that you are a great shooter, train to be a great shooter, and you will eventually become a great shooter. When you shoot a bad shot, move forward because you know that is not the norm for your abilities. Negative thoughts produce negative energies; if you entertain thoughts of “what if I lose,” or “I can’t shoot a 10,” then you are far less likely to succeed.

“Practice makes perfect” is the old adage, but a more appropriate saying is “Practice makes permanent.” Shooters and coaches should realize that we must train the fundamentals correctly to produce perfect shots consistently. Of course, the method that works for one shooter may not work for the next. Analysis of various methods is necessary to determine which methods work for particular shooters.

For example, I often think of a neighbor who farmed with his son for many years. He was injured while serving his country and always walked with a limp. His son was born

that increase or decrease your tension, and other intricacies of your shooting that can help you believe in yourself.

Several of our top junior pistol shooters recently returned from the World Shooting Championships in Munich, Germany. I was honored to serve as an assistant coach. It was a rare opportunity to stand alongside some of the best shooters in the world. For several of our young athletes, it was their first competitive experience at this level, their first venture in an overseas match. The experience these young people gained was absolutely invaluable to their shooting careers. They were able to watch some outstanding shooters in action, as well as learn what it takes to shoot in top form. They returned home challenged and ready to move forward, eager to develop the confidence that will help them be the ones to watch in future championships.

Part of what makes pistol shooting so much fun is the ever-present challenge. It’s a great feeling when athletes successfully complete a match, knowing they did all that is possible to produce a perfect performance in the face of tough competition and difficult circumstances. Experiences like these lead to confidently stepping up to the line at the next match for the next big challenge. So, regardless of the faces in the crowd or the other competitors on the firing line, you can and will be able to find the ten ring if you focus on the shots and not the other shooters. With the confidence you’ve developed, you’re sure to have fun, shoot well, and compete hard!

■ *Eric Pueppke*