



Rifle

By Launi Meili, Olympic Gold Medalist

LINKING BELIEF, DRIVE AND IMAGERY IN A CHAMPION

I recently read a very insightful quote that can apply directly to your shooting: “Watch your thoughts, as they become words. Watch your words, as they become actions. Watch your actions, as they become habits. Watch your habits, as they become belief. Watch your belief, as it becomes your destiny.”

This powerful quote summarizes what I have always believed: Putting thoughts into your mind can affect long-term outcomes in your life, taking you in virtually any direction you determine for yourself.

In this two-part series, I will first discuss concepts of belief and motivation, and then in the next issue I will outline some imagery techniques that can help you channel your motivation into positive results in competition.

We often categorize positive people by stating that they see the “glass half-full,” and negative people are often accused of seeing the “glass half-empty.” Either way, we recognize that individuals create their own cause-and-effect circumstances, and we need to be aware of the constructive or destructive results of self-talk and self-image.

If you are the kind of shooter who constantly beats yourself up after a bad shot or

when the going gets tough. There is really nothing that can hold them back. For those who feel a bad day proves they really can not shoot, they are right as well, and need to work on changing their drive and core belief.

So, does this drive just come naturally or do you have to develop it yourself? Since everyone is different, from growing up with distinct cultural backgrounds, geographical areas and diverse personal experiences, the level of your personal drive could be a result of any one of those factors or probably a mixture of all of them.

The drive may start out small; just an interest in the sport and a fun time hitting the black or clay. You may get a comment from a coach, parent or teammate that “hey, that was a great target, round or match!” By the way, this is where perceptive coaches can really help young shooters plant the seed of belief, instilling thoughts that he or she can succeed and have a future in the sport with proper training. Be sure your comments are honest and constructive so the shooter continues to trust your guidance in the future.



In order for the drive to turn into motivation for the long run, it has to come from you. If you are staying in the sport because your parents want you to, or because your best friend is shooting, then the drive will not last and there will not be any return when the going gets tough. You have to know why you are in the sport, and love accomplishing large and small goals along the way. If some-

“Becoming a champion includes a lot more than luck or natural ability. It takes hard work with a deep-seated belief that you have something special inside and it is worth all the effort to develop and bring it out.”

performance, and are so debased you do not feel anything was learned from the experience, then you may ultimately weaken the deep belief that there is a champion inside you.

In fact, the belief of a champion runs so strong, you feel it would be a sacrifice to quit before you reached your full potential, and a bad day is a learning experience, not a representation of your true ability. For shooters with thoughts, habits and beliefs this strong, they will find a way to get the job done even

From those encouraging comments, or just proving to yourself that you can get better when you put your mind to it, an idea starts to grow that the more you put into this sport, the more you can get out of it. This is a sport where the results of quality practice are quickly realized even the next time you step on the firing line. Proving you can accomplish what you put your mind to is like a force of energy. The more you do it, the more you want it and the more you trust you can take it all the way.

one else is setting your goals for you, or you are setting yours according to someone else’s ability and drive, then you are setting yourself up for disappointment. Only you can determine where you want this sport to take you and how much you are willing to train to get there.

Once you determine and believe in your long-term goals, you will be on board to go the distance and your hard work and even setbacks will all be kept in perspective. At this point, you can really start utilizing im-

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imagery in your performance to help manage thoughts, actions and belief. Imagery is one of many mental training techniques, and is the one I feel is most closely related to the spirit of the introductory quote and to determining what kind of shooter you want to be.

Imagery is mentally rehearsing exactly what you want to happen when you pick up your gun and shoot a perfect shot. It encompasses all the senses including what you want to see, hear and even feel, physically and emotionally. I did not understand the emotional part of the imagery equation until I was shooting my first Olympic final in Smallbore rifle at the 1988 Olympiad in Seoul, Korea.

While preparing for the Olympics, I used imagery and relied on it a great deal. I thought I was going the extra mile in my training, but I did not realize I was leaving out an important element. I was able to see myself shooting perfect shots all day long, even at a record-level pace in my mind. My

mental imagery paid off, and I set an Olympic Record in the preliminary match using it on every shot in my shot plan, just like I rehearsed thousands of times.

What I was not prepared for was the feeling going into the final in first place, and dealing with the pressure in a way that did not come up and bite me. It bit me hard, and I found out my shot plan and imagery were not tailored for this incredibly demanding situation. The nerves were controlling me, I was not controlling them. So over the next few years, I adapted my shot plan and the imagery in it to encompass those feelings and demands. I would not just see myself shoot a perfect shot, I would see and feel myself shoot a perfect shot being in first place in the final. I would imagine shots while thinking about being behind in the final, tied and just one-tenth of a point ahead in the final.

Every situation that I felt I could anticipate, I set up mentally in my training and then performed the perfect shot. Placing the

demands on myself through imagery and in practice helped a great deal the next time I faced an Olympic final, four years later in Barcelona, Spain. During that match I again relied on the imagery that included my ultimate goal—winning an Olympic Gold medal by executing a perfect shot plan and shooting a tough final. And on July 30, 1992 at the Olympic 50 meter Smallbore range in Barcelona, my dream came true.

Obviously, I am a firm believer in the power of imagery to help strengthen and focus your motivation and belief in yourself. In Part Two of this discussion, I will offer some specific imagery techniques that will help you take advantage of the powerful forces of your mind that might otherwise remain untapped. We will examine relaxation, shot plans and outcomes, as well as optimal times to practice imagery. Those suggestions will all be geared toward one objective: Helping you achieve your dreams.

The soft overcomes the hard,
The slow overcomes the fast,
Let your workings remain a mystery,
Just show people the results.

-Lao Tzu

Are you a naturally talented air pistol shooter? Or a hard working athlete?

Either way, you will need hard work and professional guidance to reach your peak performance. Don't let others have any advantage over you.

Email sillintercoach@yahoo.com for information.

If you follow the instructions and don't improve your score in two months, you will receive your money back!

Silvino Lyra is a 1999 USA/NRA International Advanced Shooting Coach who has coached gold and silver medalists at the Pan American Games and 5 Olympians in the 2000 & 2004 Olympic Games in the 10m air pistol element of Modern Pentathlon.