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## ADDING IMAGERY TO YOUR TRAINING PLAN



Picture courtesy of the U.S. Air Force Academy

ing—has played a critical role in the path to success.

There are numerous imagery techniques you can adopt, and I suggest you try several. The tactics I explain here can be a good starting point, but the most important concept is this: You can control your thoughts and their positive outcomes; do not let negative thoughts control you.

Here are some imagery concepts for you to consider and try:

1. Use relaxation in conjunction with mental training and imagery. Relaxation techniques train your body to respond to cues when facing tense situations and help you feel more in control. They also set the stage for imagery to have a greater impact because you are calm and open for ideas.

2. Rifle and pistol shooters should primarily use “internal” imagery. This is where you are imagining what you want to see through the perspective of your own eyes, like looking through a camera at your hold and sight picture. The other type is called external imagery. This where the “camera” or view is turned on you, where you see your whole body performing the task. This is effective for shotgun shooters to imprint the perfect body movements from stance, mount, timing and follow-through. Rifle and pistol shooters can imagine a perfect position, but since there is no physical movement to perfect (except for some pistol events) there really is not enough information in looking at your position to really help become a better shooter under pressure. Information used to shoot a good shot revolves around the sight picture, which means using internal imagery.

3. Practice imagery before you go to sleep, but do not hesitate to

practice it any time you can fit it in. Right before you sleep, however, your mind is open to suggestions and ideas, and it is a good time to explore a wide variety of competition situations. It is also a good time to reinforce that personal belief that you have something special inside. Feed the drive.

4. Make imagery part of your shot plan. A shot plan is a list of items you need to accomplish in order to shoot one successful shot. It covers the physical aspects of mounting the gun properly and feeling balanced, as well as correct head position and sight picture. Advanced shooters have developed a fairly “automatic” shot plan. In fact, things may not come to their attention unless an element is off, like cheek placement or tension somewhere in their body. Once the element is corrected, the plan falls back into place and they produce what it takes to shoot a good shot almost automatically. What helps this become automatic is the use of imagery. If the last thing “loaded” into a shooter’s mind is anticipating or reacting to the perfect sight picture, there is nothing in the way of “letting” the perfect shot happen. They have controlled all the elements going into the shot, and the last part is mentally getting and staying in the “10 ring” with imagery. Beginning and intermediate shooters will probably think about what the perfect sight picture should be, and then squeeze the trigger once they see it. They are still in a stage where they need to “make” the correct things happen, and that is perfectly fine. Advanced shooters have developed a better sense of timing and realize their hold is establishing the perfect sight picture earlier due to all the thousands of rounds down range.

5. Imagine the task and the outcome. There is no doubt that it is a great feeling to be a champion. Thinking about accomplishing that feat can be the fuel to your motivation and drive for as long as you are in the sport. Do not let it be so addicting, however, that you let go of what it takes to get you there. Shooting in tough matches and situations can be challenging and uncomfortable, but it is managing and getting through those situations that will make you a champion and allow you to achieve the long-term goal you seek. So yes, it is nice to see yourself up there on the podium, but before you revel in all the glory, don’t forget to image yourself facing all the challenges that will come, how you are going to handle them, and pay the dues that need to be paid so the championship feels earned and deserved.

Shooting is a great road to find out what you are made of. Just be sure to fuel the belief in yourself with the right words, thoughts, actions and images of the shooter you want to become. When words or thoughts are continuously negative and destructive, they will have an impact on your motivation. It is up to you to turn them around so they are a positive force on your belief, drive and destiny.