

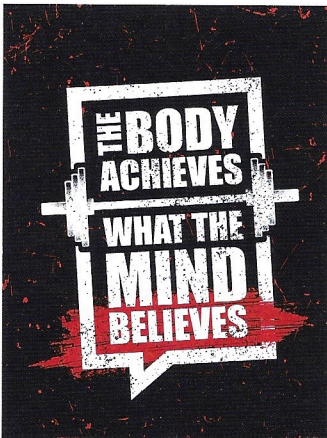
BECOME AN INDISTRACTABLE SHOOTER

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I often download classic movies to watch during my many nights on the road. One evening after a day of coaching three shooters about the importance of concentration I decided to watch *Cool Hand Luke*. As I was about to doze off a phrase jumped out at me. It was the scene after Luke's second escape attempt and the Road Captain said, "You run one time, you got yourself a set of chains. You run twice you got yourself two sets. You ain't gonna need no third set, 'cause you gonna get your mind right."

When I was a kid my eyesight and reflexes were great. I could hold my gun in tight, look into the window, call pull and move out with the target. Nowadays I need to hold my gun out much farther and use my expanded soft focus to detect the emerging target with my

shot well, so I had a reason to concentrate on watching the targets. I seldom succumbed to distractions during competitions while my father was alive. Seeking my father's admiration was my reason to concentrate.



Get Your Mind Right

The importance of "getting your mind right" before calling for a target was exactly what I was attempting to communicate to those three shooters. Most people believe a clay target sport involves a contest between the shooter and the target, so they rely on tactics to attack the targets. In reality, the contest is between the shooter and his or her ability to resist mental and visual distractions that suddenly disrupt the shooter's concentration and ability to correctly watch and focus on the target.

While listening to Nir Eyal's book, *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life*, I discovered that self-sabotaging distractions are a common phenomenon among clay target shooters. The theme of Eyal's narrative relates to the process of setting a specific goal, and then sabotaging the goal when it actually comes time to do it. I see this phenomenon occurring when I tell shooters how they need to shoot to eliminate a bad habit, and they keep shooting the way they want to shoot because it feels right.

peripheral vision. Yet, once or twice during each event a distraction will disrupt my concentration, and my inner teenager will tell me to look into the window just before I call for the target. And every time I do it the target blows past me.

I've always known my mind was wired differently. I eventually came to learn that I was, and still am, severely dyslexic. Although I struggled to compete with my classmates in the classroom at school, I had no problem competing with adults on the skeet field. Watching clay targets was so much easier for me than trying to read a sentence. More importantly, my father was proud of me when I

Concentration When it Matters

My personal experiences coaching individuals who struggle to pay attention (e.g., ADHD) have provided me with some insight into helping clay target shooters become less susceptible to distractions. Each shooter must go through a process of trial and error to discover which strategies help them improve his or her concentration.

Elite clay target shooters have a highly developed ability to pay attention during the moment of truth. I introduced the importance of this concept in my first book, *The Moment of Truth: How You*

Look Determines What You See. I described the moment of truth as the period of time between when the shooter prepares to call for the target, and when the target passes through the ideal break zone.

Paying attention during the entire moment of truth requires monotonous mental and visual discipline. In other words, shooters must get their mind right before calling for every target, so they see the emerging target, and then watch it continuously until it breaks. Getting the mind right is a process that minimizes the intrusion of negative distractions during the moment of truth by employing an effective positive distraction.

Negative distractions can be divided into external and internal. External distractions are environmental conditions that are perceived by the shooter's senses. Although auditory distractions can occur while a shooter is on a station, the most common external distractions are visual. Internal distractions are associated with the 60,000 thoughts that float through a shooter's mind every day. The stress associated with striving to achieve a specific performance goal causes a negative emotion, such as fear or doubt, to become "hooked" onto one of these random thoughts that creep into the shooter's mind while he or she is trying to concentrate and focus on the next target. Once hooked, the negative emotion invariably substitutes a bad shooting habit for the proper acquisition of the target, and execution of the appropriate pre-planned move.

Positive distractions - In his book *The Power of Habit*, researcher Charles Duhigg described the three elements of a habit: a trigger that tells the brain which habit to use; a routine which activates the habitual behavior;

and a reward which reinforces the emotion that is attached to the behavior. This begs the question, why are so many negative distractions triggered by the desire to break clay targets? The simple answer is that the desire to break the next target activates the wrong habitual behavior.



Use Your Mind Right

If we view the shooter's mind as a computer it would consist of three areas of memory: stowed (explicit), working (short-term), and procedural (implicit). Stowed memory is the hard drive that contains all the shooter's knowledge. Working memory is the RAM, which is a portion of the shooter's knowledge that relates to the tasks that are active on the desktop. Procedural memory is linked to a desktop icon that activates a specific program when it has been triggered.

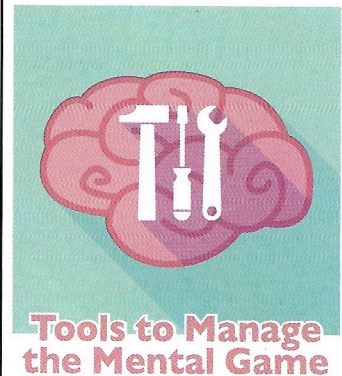
You would use working memory to make a conscious decision about which desktop icon to click, in order to accomplish a specific task, and then you would rely on the procedural memory within the computer to automatically complete the pre-programmed action linked to the icon.

Shooters must concentrate on using their working memory (conscious mind) to manage the watching reflex and allow their procedural memory (unconscious mind) to automatically manage the shooting reflex. Shooters must develop confidence in the tasks they can control, such as watching and focusing on the target; and

they must develop trust in the good habits they can't control, such as the automatic pre-planned move that will break the target.

The clay target sports seem paradoxical to most recreational shooters because average shooters tend to rely exclusively on their working memory to execute every element of the shot sequence. Logical reasoning implies that moving the muzzle of the shotgun to a precise place in front of the moving target and firing when the picture looks right will cause the target to break. It seems counter-intuitive to suggest that by simply watching the target continuously the muzzle of the shotgun will automatically point to the correct lead in front of the target.

Shooters cannot control the random thoughts that enter their mind. However, they can strive to understand how their mind functions so they can develop strategies to get their mind right before every shot.



Apply Kinetic Visualization - The pre-station routine should help the shooter see and feel the speed of the target. This awakens the correct pre-planned move (habit).

- Embrace Acceptance - Recognize that negative distractions are usually caused by the tension of execution, which commonly arises during the pre-shot routine. Acknowledge the distraction for what it is, accept it, and then ignore it.
- Be Curious - Begin each shot with curiosity to trick the conscious mind into looking for an unexpected target to emerge. This creates a state of readiness.
- Exercise Patience - Allow the target to emerge into your expanded soft focus, which optimizes visual acquisition of the emerging target at the eye hold. Allow the target to emerge into your visual field.
- Manage Intensity of Focus - Adjust the transition from soft focus to hard focus according to the distance between the acquisition zone and the break zone. The greater the distance between the two zones the more time spent in soft focus.

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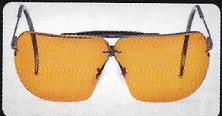
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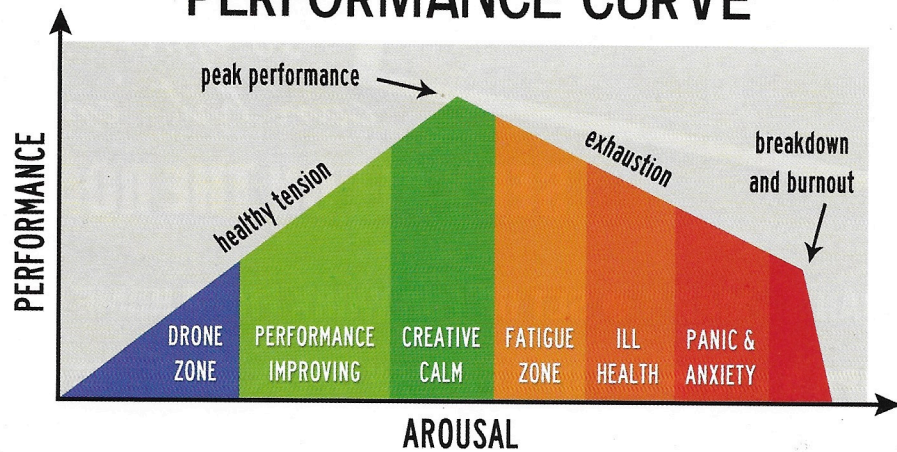
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Applying the Science

Psychologist Jonathan Bricker developed a technique called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which disarms the emotional discomfort that often promotes negative distractions. Instead of trying to suppress the tendency to react to the sudden urge precipitated by a negative emotion, Bricker recommends stepping back to acknowledge the emotional hook that prompted the distraction, and allow the emotional hook (fear or doubt) to be released naturally. Then repeat the normal pre-shot routine to get the mind right. Settling your eyes into expanded soft focus quiets the mind before calling for the target.

Helping clay target shooters discover the awesome potential that exists within their procedural memory is a deliberate process that requires considerable time and effort. Foremost among all the suggested remedies are: accept that negative distractions are part of every clay target sport, and just commit to hard focus and fire at the break point.

The Shima Shooting Experience™ is a three-day small group clinic conducted by me in San Antonio, TX. These SSEs involve several drills that I designed to help serious shooters develop the mental and visual discipline that enables them to become indistractable during competition. A quiet mind is an indistractable mind. ■

Editor's Note: John Shima is a former five-time World Skeet Champion and was high average in 12 gauge for two years. John is the leading authority on detection of visual deceptions and prescribing appropriate visual training to unleash the power of reality for clay target shooters. For more information about the Shima Shooting MethodSM, the Clinic Schedule, his new Shima Shooting ExperienceSM, or to arrange a Private Consultation, contact John via email at john@johnshima.com

To order his books or view previous articles go to www.johnshima.com/publications

Tools to Manage the Mental Game Continued

- Commit to the Break Point - Override the twinge of uncertainty near the break zone by committing to hard focusing and firing at the intended break point. The focus and fire strategy eliminates defocusing to verify the lead picture.
- Avoid Analyzing Imperfect Shots - The analysis of less than perfect breaks or misses activates working memory and blocks the ability to trust procedural memory, which is necessary to automatically activate the appropriate pre-planned move to engage the target. The purpose of getting the mind right is to stop analytical self-talk and rely on good habits.