

## Re-enforcing Positive Mental Attitude

By Jim See

We all been there at least once, you walk away from a stage with the cheers and congratulations from fellow shooters. For some reason you shot a stage so well you surprised yourself. Well congratulations you were not lucky, you just realized your top potential.

As humans we have remarkable abilities, gross and fine motor functions combining to produce achievements in many forms. When we train and practice we are syncing these fine and gross motor skills to the level of performance that we are capable of achieving. These skills can be retained with limited practice once we have established that muscle memory, just like riding a bike, 20 years off of a bike and your body system will have you back riding in no time.

What we need to understand is the mental aspect of the game is not the same. As humans with emotions that affect us daily, in different ways, we need to build the mental focus that allows us to perform to our top potential. Now I cannot tell you how to do that, but I can tell you how I do it.

First thing I need to start with is confidence in my gear, I have literally shot my rifle 1 day before a major match, on the road somewhere, after all my ammo was loaded, and walked away thinking "wow that's not good". When that happens the best thing I can do is walk away give it half a day and try again. 90% of the time it was me, or a range anomaly and not the equipment. The time away gives me the ability to think through my gear, possible range condition effects, and eliminate any mechanical issues. After this calm and reflective thought, if I can lay back down shoot 15 good shots and hit a few small targets, I immediately tell myself the gear is ready and I believe it.

First stage jitters have always been a problem for me, and they are not easy to correct the morning of the match if you have them. It wasn't until I started to practice shooting a first stage that I started to get a handle on them. Go to your personal/practice shooting range and rather than going through your normal routine shoot a stage. If you're with a friend have him give you a realistic course of fire description, work up your dope and have him time you. You just went cold to a line and shot 5 targets with 2 shots each in 2 minutes. Now you can go to your routine of 100 yard zero or LR dope verification. You're building the confidence that you can walk to a line as a cold shooter with a cold rifle and perform.

I start on a roll and carry it through the day. Those matches that I shoot a solid first stage on are pure confidence builders. Just like a bad stage that I evaluate, I also evaluate my good stages; was my dope spot on? Or could I add a tenth to the target over 800 yards to better center my hits? Remove as much error as you can from the system even when you are shooting well. The confidence that your elevation calculations are spot on lets you think about the important stuff, like wind and position building.

Visualization is used by every major athlete, lots of times you see boxers and baseball players swinging at air, in their mind there is a ball or a face in front of them. I try to visualize or dry run a stage in my mind before I shoot it. But may-be even more valuable for my confidence is to reinforce mentally the actions I took to clean a stage. It's much easier to relive something you just did than to make it up in your mind ahead of time. See your position, feel your trigger pull, and watch the targets swing, that can be a huge positive reinforcement and confidence builder when you visualize it.

Look at the positives even under poor circumstances, even the top guys can have a couple bad stages and still pull off a win. At the 2015 Heat Stroke Open I shot one prairie dog at 310 yards, I then sent the next 9 rounds at a 446 yard prairie dog, by the fourth miss I was wishing he was a real Prairie dog so he would drop in a hole and end my agony. I never did hit that second dog. To say I was a little besides myself was an understatement. After a quick self-review of what happened, it was out of my mind. Because I believed I shot that stage the very best I could have within the restraints of the COF. I saw the majority of my misses, I corrected every shots wind hold based on impacts I had seen, the switching tail wind ate my lunch and there was not a lot I could do about that in a condition that showed no mirage. I told myself everything I did was correct and moved on. From there I went on to shoot 9/10 and 10/10 on the next two stages.

Use some of these techniques next time your training or at a match, unlike our muscle memory, we need to train our mental conditioning often and in a positive productive manner.

Keep them on the steel!