

# The Power of Positive Thinking

*Don't worry, we're not about to tell you how you too can change your life simply by reading OUR book or selling OUR product, which really sells itself, as you'll be doing all your friends a favor... But if you think a little about what goes on in your head you might be able to do a little attitude adjustment to give your scores a bit of a nudge along.*

Make no mistake; performance in shooting is more than 90% mental. We all know how to work our bodies until we are physically fit. But what can we do to improve our mental disposition so that when the time comes to perform we have a focused and uncluttered frame of mind? I honestly don't know all the answers to this. I've been searching for many years and have found but a few pieces to the greater puzzle.

## Step One – A Positive Outlook on Life

Every person we come into contact, whether we consciously realize it or not, has an effect on our state of mind. This may be profound, or it may be negligible, depending on our susceptibility and the strength of character of those who influence us. It is also possible to categorize these people as having either a positive or a negative effect on us.

Just as an interesting exercise, think about your daily acquaintances and put a mental plus or minus beside each name. And I'm not talking a plus for physical attractions either, guys. Do they leave you feeling better for talking to them, or is it an inevitable downer? In most cases the swing probably isn't too far one way or the other. But on the other hand, if you have a day full of interaction with people who have a negative outlook even the most cheerful disposition takes a beating. I'm not saying you should sever all ties with the minus crowd, but take the cumulative effect into consideration. You may certainly wish to avoid certain influences for a couple of days leading up to an important match.

## Step Two - A Positive Outlook on Shooting

I know that I have made this point before, but it is a ripper.

After a match, what are the particular shots that stick in your mind? When asked how did you shoot, do you mention a magic ten in your third series or do you bemoan the seven and four eights? Sure, the bad shots are real and should not be ignored, but to dwell on them means you're reinforcing them. I've seen shooters who make such a production out of shooting a six, berating themselves with much wailing and beating of breast, that it's only a matter of time before they send another snow bunny out there to keep it company. To agonize on a bad shot is to expend too much mental energy in a negative way.

Every match has at least one memorable shot that makes you feel great. It's ideal to pause after shooting a good technical shot (not necessarily a ten). Use this time to remember how everything felt. Replay as much of it as you can remember in your mind. In this way you are reinforcing something good, and it will help you to repeat it, time and again.

It is also important to adopt a "poker" face for your match. This will help you adopt a calm demeanor that ultimately will become second nature. Showing anger either with facial contortions, muttering or outright curses serve no positive purpose. You may be embarrassed by making a disturbance, you will certainly be unpopular on the firing line, and if anything you are encouraging your competitors with your obvious lack of self control.

I have watched some of the world's best shooters put an eight down range, but to their credit you would never know. They understand what is required to recover. They might switch to dry fire or they might take a break from their shooting. Either way, they accept the outcome, get over it immediately and look to making the next shot a technically correct one. This composure and maturity is what makes the difference between good shooters and great shooters.

## Step Three – Creating a Calm

Life these days can be both hectic and chaotic. Pressures of work, family commitments and even the sheer volume of external distractions leave our poor little brains dazed and confused.

There are a number of cures for this ailment. Various forms of meditation can help. I recommend avoiding at all cost the intelligence-killing influence of television, but as in all things moderation is the real secret here. But the best remedy for uncluttering my ravaged gray matter has been floatation.

This is not a common form of therapy in the United States, but it does exist in larger areas. It comprises a floatation tank (it looks like an oversized bath with a cover), with just a few inches of body temperature water of extremely high salinity. The

idea is to turn the lights out and float for a period of usually an hour. All sensory perception is removed. The water fully supports the body, which will take anything up to half an hour to fully relax on the first visit. There is no light or sound. The sensation is one of "self" simply floating in nothingness. For some reason this period of total sensory deprivation leaves a feeling of wellbeing and order. One hour in a floatation tank is equivalent to seven hours' sleep, but it refreshes the mind to an amazing degree. The whole world looks different.

#### **Step 4 – Protecting the Calm**

Once again I have harped on this before, but the act of being prepared for any calamity will prevent confusion, anger and despair. Simply by writing out a list of contingency plans should ANYTHING go wrong and having it on hand to reinforce your state of mind you will be prepared for the unexpected. This should be an integral part of your Match Plan.

At a major match some years ago the 32 semi auto I was using threw its rear sight under recoil. I could not find it on the ground or in the grass nearby. I had fired all but one shot, and I was in my final series of Center Fire Precision. I called the range officer over. I pointed to my gun. I said, "I've fired four shots. I've lost my rear sight. I want to claim a break and cease to function."

He looked at my gun. He looked at me. He said, "You still have a minute and a half."

I looked at him. I looked at the gun. I looked back at him. I said, "I want to claim a break and cease to function."

He looked at my gun. He looked at me. He said, "Can't you fix it?"

I said, "I can't find the rear sight. I'd need a hammer and a drift to drive in a pin that's probably sheared off anyway. I want to claim a break and cease to function."

"But you've still got time to get your shot away." He was clutching at straws. He'd never dealt with a break and cease to function and it clearly scared him witless.

This was beginning to sound like a Monty Python sketch. "I want to claim a break and cease to function!" This time loud enough to disturb the referee's pleasant reverie. Finally he came over to sort out the trouble.

In the end I was allowed extra time for a shot with my brother's gun to finish my series.

My point to this story is, due to my experience I knew the rules well enough to know my rights as a shooter. I was in an unusual situation, which was compounded by a green range officer who had no idea of the rules. Had I been less experienced I would have either lost a shot or been convinced that I had to take a blind shot and hope it hit the paper somewhere. But worse than that, so much worse, would have been the state of mind I would have been in by the time I reached the Rapid Fire section of the match.

The other piece of invaluable advice is to mind your own business on the line. Your neighbor might be having a bad day and might want to share his misfortune with anybody who will listen. Don't. You can always commiserate with him after the match has ended.

I once saw a lady shooter who threw such a tantrum when scorers could not find a fifth shot on her target that they gave her another shot out of sheer embarrassment. Everybody who witnessed it was deeply annoyed. By allowing themselves to become emotionally involved they let their own performance suffer.

Your target might break down. Don't take it as a personal affront. It happens. They'll move you to another target that's just as good. It will even in all probability be the same distance from the firing line.

The match referee is looking closely at your arm angle between shots in Center Fire Duel. To the extent that you notice him each series. He is NOT out to get you. He's probably just trying to feel like he's doing his job. Maybe he's trying to impress a good looking spectator.

You notice the shooter in the next bay put a shot in the dirt and still have ten shots on his Free Pistol card. For starters you should not have counted as you need to have YOUR wits about YOU. For another thing, what will you achieve? If you say nothing you will fume internally. If you accuse him of cheating you will probably start an argument. Either way, you lose.

It's easy to see in all of these cases how distractions cause a lack of concentration. The secondary effect is on our mood. I guess the more objective we can be in "shooting mode", the more we are able to perform our act of producing good technical shots in

a positive manner.

Believe in this and you will use reason to avoid a destructive frame of mind.