

You are NOT what you shoot

By Todd Bender

Recently a well known financial company ran advertisements depicting people walking around with a net worth number under their arms, wherever they go they carry this representation of their net worth with them. In shooting, we do this religiously with our scores.

Because of this behavior the act of casually hanging around the gun club can be a dangerous thing for your shooting. If you examine the content of most conversations amongst shooters, you'll find that clay target shooting, and more importantly skeet, is a negative culture. Most shooters hang out and talk about their mistakes, which if contemplated rationally, is not very constructive. And even worse, many shooters attach their sole significance and importance and sometimes their place in society to a random number... the score that they broke. Your score is not a representation of your worth to the world. Nor is it always true and accurate representation of your performance. It's just a number.

Taking control of your confidence

For this reason, in recent years, I have changed my approach to the sport and how I talk about it. I rarely comment on my score when asked by other shooters. I'll tell you about my performance, but will refrain from labeling it with a number. Why? Talking about your score with others can be fraught with pitfalls. When you understand how the mind works, you will learn that anything that you say, do, or write down, makes an imprint on your Self-Image. Many may recognize this as a term "Self-Image" from Lanny Bassham's Mental Management program. Your Self-image is synonymous with your confidence. Hit a High Two, your Self-Image gets a positive imprint, "I can hit High Two", miss it, and your Self-image takes a hit, "I suck at High Two." Sound familiar?

Let's say for example that you break a 97x100 at a tournament, and miss three Low Fours in the process. Given that the Self-image is imprinted by actions, you had ninety-seven positive imprints, "I can hit these", and three negative imprints at Low Four, "I can't hit at Low Four." But, then you hang around at the gun club, and twenty people come up to you that day and say "Hey, how'd you shoot?"

Your response is very predictable, "I broke a 97x100, but I missed three Low Fours." Now, you tell that to twenty different people, and as far as your Self-image is concerned, you just missed Low Four another sixty times! Its simple math. Remember, anything that you say, or do, or write down, makes an imprint on your Self-Image. And your Self-Image is always listening. So, by the end of the day, you have a Low Four problem. Doubt it? Look around you, listen, and watch.

Your Self-Image makes you do what it is like you to do. My Self-Image is set to break 100 straights, it's like him to do so, so he does so with little interference from his Self-Image, as do most top shooters. But if your Self-Image is set at breaking 95x100, and you find yourself 75x75 going into the last round, it's more than likely that a 22x25 or worse is lurking for you in the last round. Not because you lack the physical skill, but because your Self-Image needs to stay in its comfort zone.

The common term for such an occurrence is choking, the more technical term, a Self-Image correction. Since it's not like you to break 100x100s, you're out of your comfort zone and the Self-Image corrects the situation. You get nervous, because you're in uncharted waters. Your Self-Image makes you do what it's like you to do. Sounding more familiar?

The solution? Instead of instilling the bad things you did, talk about the good that you did, and the solutions to the mistakes. It is easy to say, "I hate Low Five, I always miss Low Five." But again, remember your Self-image is always listening. So it assumes, "Well, I guess we are terrible at Low Five."

So, what is your mind set on the next time you step up to Low Five? Your present mind set and Self-Image won't guarantee a miss, but it makes it a whole helluva lot more likely doesn't it? Wouldn't you be better off walking up to Station Five thinking, "I own these shots"? Again, such a statement and belief doesn't guarantee an outcome, but it makes a lot more likely doesn't it?

Rather, it would be better to say when talking about mistakes, "You know, if I paid more attention to my hold point and set my eyes longer to get a better look at the target, I will hit Low Five." Talking about the solution is a positive way to avoid a negative situation. And talking about how well you are shooting, is taking a big step toward moving your Self-Image to where you want it to be. "Yes, I broke a 72x100, but I hit all of my shots at Station Seven, and I can build off of that positive note."

What the next event means to you

I have in the past, at times, had anxiety walking out onto the field to compete. It may not have shown outwardly, but it was there. Not so much anymore though, because I am more educated about such situations. But, before I learned to deal with environmental or external forces, I was affected by this negativity. Maybe I was 300x300 and anxious about the impending final one hundred targets with the .410. Could I break 400x400, or would I embarrass myself with a 96x100? Understand that all anxiety is linked to a fear of failure, looking bad amongst your peers. These were real fears, fears that could, and at times, did inhibit my performances. Fears that face all of us at all levels of the sport

I've been very fortunate in my career as a shooter, being exposed to the best competitors that this and other sports have to offer. I've had the opportunity to meet and discuss in detail, competing at the highest levels with a number of elite performers in other sports. For this I am grateful, but few relationships have had a greater impact on me than the one I have with Olympic Gold Medalist Lanny Bassham. My game has changed since I met and started working with Lanny. He has and continues to teach me things as a shooter and more importantly a coach. Yet some still look at his work, and others who specialize in the mental side of the sports as if they were merchants of "snake oil". This is a Dark Ages mentality.

Last summer, as we worked side-by-side during a Bender Bassham Seminar, he said something to our group that piqued my interest. Lanny commented that there is no reason to be afraid or anxious about an impending competition, because only two things can happen, and both are good. You will either shoot very well, which is great, or you will shoot less than expected. But it's these "less than expected" performances where you learn things, things that push you to the next level. Make you operate at stages that otherwise you would have never attained. I found this enlightening and at the same time so simple. Why would one approach a competition any other way? There is no better example of this theory than Lanny's life path itself.

Lanny Bassham's story is an interesting one and inspiring. As a member of the 1972 United States Olympic Team he went to Munich favored to win the Gold in the International Rifle Event. But unprepared for the environment and pressures of the Olympics, Lanny in his own words, "choked", and settled for a Silver Medal. He was devastated. All the years of hard work, four years...for Silver. Lanny was the first loser.

This event led him to search for a way for him to be better prepared for the 1976 Olympics. He figured if he did nothing to address what happened in Munich, it would just repeat itself four years later in Montreal. His research led him to the Gold Medal in '76, and more importantly the formation of his life's work and business, the hugely successful Mental Management Systems that works with elite performers in all sports and areas of human achievement to this day.

Although devastating to him at the time in 1972, winning Silver in Munich in hindsight was the best thing that ever happened to Bassham. Had he won Gold in '72, he would have assumed that he knew everything, and never would have pushed further to develop Mental Management Systems, and to go on to dominate his sport on a global level for nearly a decade.

By learning from your mistakes as you correct them, and by focusing on what you did right, it will make it more likely that they occur again and that confidence should spread or "bleed" into areas that you need to grow. But remaining negative will adversely affect growth in you and in those around you. Ultimately,

the choice to have a positive influence on your game and to further your understanding is solely up to you.

For information about Todd Bender Performance Systems International and for Todd's 2015 Clinic Schedule, go to the Clinic Schedule Page at toddbenderintl.com or contact Todd Bender at bendershima@aol.com. For Todd's newest videos on skeet shooting, contact Sunrise Productions at 800.862.6399.