

## What Beginners Must Learn

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### Introduction

We turn again to our stable of experienced shooters for the main question this time around: What are the most important things beginning shooters must learn to get to the next level?

We think you'll find it interesting that most of the advice being offered has nothing to do with type of equipment and technical information, and mostly has to do with philosophy, expectations and attitude.

Before we get into that, we have a brief report on the most recent Nationals as well as short pieces on the problem with positive thinking and block practice versus random practice.

### Nationals Report

Gil: Welcome to the coaching hour, November, 2014. I've got several, small things of business to talk about, and then we're going to venture off into our main topic tonight, which is what beginners should learn in the beginning of the game that will help them progress into the intermediate phase of the game, or said another way, what did you- guys not do, that when you got to the intermediate phase you had to go back and do or redo or relearn, and we'll get to that in just a minute. Last night we talked to John Poe about his first Nationals experience, and I have to tell you he was a little overwhelmed; but John and his mom and his dad came to the RV three times. The first time they came to the RV, he was a little under the weather. He wasn't doing quite as well, and I said: Look, just quit trying to shoot a score. You're here to learn things. Learn something in every event and every station you go from. Your goal needs to be that at every station you walk out of to have learned something.

Be better than you were when you walked in when you leave the station. Get back into process. And he did a good job of that. I have to tell you that his dad and his mom both said: You know, thank you guys very much, simply because almost everything that we talked about, well, Shane might have had a few way-out experiences; but most of the things that we talked about that could possibly happen to him happened to him, including being coached by people, and it did help him get through that experience. We all know that there's nothing like your first National Championship experience. It's just an amazing thing, and I've said to many people you've got to go to that event five years in a row before you can ever think about competing.

I also talked to one of our young shooters out of Oregon named Lonnie who was there with his mom and his grandparents. He called me the first day and said: Mr. Ash, I'm shooting like crap.

I said: Well, what are you talking about? He said, I shot a 35 on the first course.

And I said: Come by the RV. And they immediately pulled up over there, and I said: Look, you're trying to shoot a score, aren't you?

Yeah, I'm trying to do good.

I said: Stop. It ain't work. Go back to what we talked about when we were in Oregon two months ago, process. Make the plan, shoot the plan. Stay within yourself. Pick your breakpoints. Nothing else happens. Nothing else matters. Pick your breakpoints. Shoot the bird in the breakpoint, and I'm preaching to the choir, I understand; but I want to get this on the tape in case they listen to it. And, duh, it began to work, and both Lonnie and John shot really well the rest of the weekend.

I talked to Bill Smith and Richard Duehl about the same experiences. These are two older guys that came from Birmingham, Alabama. Been shooting in the woods over there and never saw as many crossing targets as they saw at the National Championship, and they had their mouths open and were panting for a while; but I just explained to them, you're not here to win. You're here for the experience and to learn from everything you can learn from. This isn't a local Georgia shoot. This is the National Championship, and you're not going to see cheap shots here. I thought the targets were great. I thought there were a lot more good, long crossing targets this year than I've seen at that championship in the 25 years we've been shooting it. I enjoyed them.

Anyway, I wanted to let y'all know what I found out about those. And this goes back to one of the things that Gary and I gleaned from the Golf Flow book, which was if you understand the pattern, it takes panic out of the situation, and because I understood the pattern so well, I was able to take the panic out of these three groups of guys' situations and get them back into shooting better.

#### Describing the Zone via Golf Flow

Gil: I want to speak to two things, which I'm going to do for the next six or eights months. I'm going to pull two things out of the Golf Flow book, just things to think about. Gio Valiante

referred to something that he called normative failure. Successful people are the ones that fail the most and keep on persisting. When failure is the norm, when you understand how to cope with failure, resilience becomes second nature. I'm going to say that again. When failure becomes the norm or when you understand how to learn from failure, resilience becomes second nature.

Failure is very much a part of the learning curve, which I think is something that beginners need to admit to themselves and build on. One other thought from the Golf Flow book; the links between conscious control and effort are abundant. By trusting your habits and engaging in implicit rather than busy and verbally explicit thinking, you are essentially reducing the communications between the motor and nonmotor regions of the brain.

A gradual withdraw of conscious, particularly verbal thoughts about the golf swing occurs as a golfer slides into flow. As control gradually rises, the game of golf should feel more effortless. This is why verbalizing the problem and even verbalizing the command to fix it is confusing to the brain and inhibits flow.

I'm going to read that one more time because I want you all to understand how confusing it is to carry on a conversation with yourself about the predicament you find yourself in and try to verbally fix it. Tell yourself, Gil, do it this way. Don't do it that way, Gil. Do it this way.

The links between conscious control and effort are abundant. By trusting your habits and engaging in implicit thinking, trusting your habits, rather than busy and verbally explicit thinking ... oh, God, what do I have to do to fix it, oh, I got to do this, I got to do that ... you are essentially reducing the communications between the motor and nonmotor region of the brain. A gradual withdrawal of conscious, particularly verbal thoughts about the golf swing occurs as the golfer slides into flow. As control gradually rises, the game of golf should feel even more effortless. This is describing the zone. It's damn near impossible to be in the zone if you keep going back to conscious verbal analysis and conscious verbal commands about what you need to do.

People talking to themselves, and you know it happens on the course. I'm just wanting to make you aware this is why verbalizing the problem and even verbalizing the command to fix it is confusing to the brain and inhibits flow.

### The Problem with Positive Thinking

Gil: That said, I want to talk to you about an article that Jeff Wolfe sent me about the problem with positive thinking. You all have heard about positive thinking; but the research that this paper is talking about is the truth is that positive thinking often hinders us.

I'm not going to read all of the studies. I'll read the first one. More than two decades ago, this fella conducted a study in which he presented women enroll in the weight reduction program with several short, open-ended scenarios about the future events. He asked them to imagine how they would fare in each one. Some of these scenarios asked the woman to imagine that they had successfully completed the program. Others asked them to imagine

situations in which they were tempted to cheat on their diets. I then asked the women to rate how positive or negative their resulting thoughts and images were. A year later I checked on these women. The results were striking. The more positively the women had imagined themselves in these scenarios the fewer pounds they had lost.

Interesting study. Positive thinking fools our minds into perceiving that we've already attained our goal, slackening our readiness to pursue it. Pay attention here. This is some good stuff. Some critics of positive thinking have advised people to discard all happy talk and get real by dwelling on the challenges or obstacles; but this is too extreme a correction.

Studies have shown that this strategy doesn't work any better than the other one; but what does work better is a hybrid approach that combines positive thinking with realism. Here's how it works. Think of a wish. For a few minutes imagine the wish coming true. Let your mind wonder and drift where it will; but then shift gears. Spend a few more minutes imagining the obstacles that stand in the way of realizing your wish. This simple process that the researcher calls mental contrasting has produced powerful results in laboratory experiments.

When participants have performed mental contrasting with reasonable, potentially attainable wishes, they have come away more energized and achieved better results compared with participants who either positively fantasized or dwelt on the obstacles.

When participants have performed mental contrasting with wishes that are not reasonable or attainable because they've gone from the fantasy to the reality, they have disengaged more from these wishes. Whenever they are fantasizing about things that they cannot achieve because they've done the mental contrasting of what they love to happen but what obstacles land in the way, they have disengaged more from these wishes. Mental contrasting spurs us on when it makes sense to pursue a wish and lets us abandon wishes more readily when it doesn't so that we can go after other more reasonable ambitions.

In a recent study on a healthy eating exercise, we divided participants into two groups. Members of one group engaged in mental contrasting and then performed a planning exercise designed to help them overcome whatever obstacles stood in their way. Four minutes later members of this group, they were working out, classes long each week as the control group and eating considerably more vegetables.

In studies we found that people who engage in mental contrasting recovered from chronic back pain better, behaved more constructively in relationships, got better grades in school and even managed stress better in the workplace.

You don't think your way to the right action. You've got to act your way to the right thinking. You can dream about it all you want to; but what this talks about is something that we've talked about and that I've worked with each and every one of you on, and that is put your goals out there; but let's look realistically at what you have to do to achieve those goals. Make that plan and work that plan.

**Block Practice Versus Random Practice**

Gil: Bob, I'm coming to you now for a short synopsis on the paper you sent me on the difference in blocked and random practice and how contrary that is to most of the thinking in the coaching circles these days.

Bob: Okay. So I spent a lot of time looking at different types of practice, trying to figure out where is the best results. You've often been told that we can make you good on any day; but they may not stick, and it turns out that usually that a particular kind of practice means that we sat there and had you work on the same presentation over and over and over and over and over again, and many of you have reported taking a flat of shells out and working on one particular shot. Alternatively, and I think Gil and Vicki and certainly most of the coaches I know that I have a lot of respect for, will make you move around.

Gil: Does that mean you have respect for us?

Bob: Yes, sir, it does.

Gil: I just want to qualify that just for the people who don't know who you are. I want to make sure. I'm just saying.

Bob: It's that we're not going to let you stick on one target, and, yes, you may take 10, 15, even 20 shots; but you're going to be moved around to other targets afterward. What goes on in the two differences is that, when you sit there and work for a very long period of time on one particular element, you are doing what is described in literature as block training. When you move things around, you recalculate, rechallenge yourself, you're doing random training.

Block training reinforces as does repeated episodes of smaller elements, a behavior by wrapping around neuro fibers with myelin. So those particular networks become faster. What happens in random practice is that you're making the brain work the cells' connections more. So, in other words, you are building more and more connections, not just making faster connections that already exist.

Okay. How do we know that? Well, in the last five years, technology has advanced to the point where we can turn off certain areas in your brain, and because of what's called functional MRI we know that under certain challenges which are processing challenges there are specific areas in the frontal and pre-frontal area of the brain that are the ones that really work hard. We can turn those small areas off.

When we turn those small areas off and test for retention of skill and reduced errors, the processing center being turned off makes random training look exactly like block training. That is down the line with block training. You will see that you can't retain what you thought you really got good at and your error rate doesn't improve.

With random training it does get better and you retain better, and this has been looked at, even several months in different training areas, not only classroom work in mathematics but in music and actually in a few other sports, unfortunately not specifically in shooting but the crossover is pretty strong.

Gil: Let me add something to that. I know I did a coaching hour on it, and I think I called it the Tony Morrow Gag Factor. I had Tony Morrow over here who punched out of AA into master class by winning the Krieghoff Cup at the National Championship. That's a hell of an accomplishment, and I had him over here and I stole something from Lynn Marriott and Pia Nilsson on their ball toss, that you can stand by a five-gallon bucket and drop a ball in it, walk two steps back, toss the ball, walk two steps back, toss. There's going to be a point in which you get far enough away from that bucket to where you don't trust your toss and the brain gets in the way.

I stole from that a system that I got Tony on, and I set him up on the same left-to-right curling, chandelle crosser, and I made him shoot it at 20 yards, 30 yards, 40 yards, and 50 yards. He knew where he was going. He started at 20. He hit it. Went to 30. He hit it. Went to 40. He lucked out and hit it. Went to 50 and lost it. And what I did is I took him back down to the 20-yard line and said: Okay, how does this feel? Look at that. Look what happens. Look. How does it feel when you shoot this target?

And he talked to me about how it felt, and I said: Okay, let's go back to 50. I said: Feel the same way and shoot that target. And he smashed it. Now, I talked him into hitting that target; but one of the things that I told Tony to go home and do is rather than going incrementally in steps back from a crosser go 15 yards. Start at 20 and go to 35. Go back to 25 and go to 40 so that in each step that you change it involves the mental process that block training doesn't necessarily involve. Am I on the same page, Bob?

Bob: Yes, and I'm going to come to that. You did a little bit of a variation, and I'll come to that, which was later in the paper; but, yes, you are in the same ballpark very strongly.

Gil: I mean, you can sit there and you can shoot the same damn shot, and I told people to do it. I'm just as at fault as anybody. But you can shoot the same shot over and over again; but what Bob is telling us is without the same mental get-ready, okay, this is a right to left, across the barrel, medium crosser, lots of speed, see it come, stupid in front, the same speed, without that mental process, if we just go through, okay, I know the picture, same speed at the end, same speed at the end, you can do 500 of those and hit 490 of them; but the retention is not going to be as great as if we took each shot as a new thing.

Is that right, Bob?

Bob: Absolutely. And, in fact, you can even randomize it more than that. You could go left to right instead of right to left and then come back to right to left and you would have randomized it enough to do the same effect.

Gil: Now, what we've learned in 22 years and over 8-million rounds of ammo fired in front of us, I didn't realize it; but that's what we're doing. We're making the brain take the same move but

take a different mental approach. We've changed the timing and changed the distance and changed the speed; therefore, the shooter can't use what he learned on the last one. The end product is the same; but the approach is entirely different. So what we do is we take them to different shots, maybe the same left to right; but we make them shoot different speeds, different heights, different breakpoints which really turns it into more random practice. Right?

Bob: Correct. I know because I'm throwing out something that challenges a lot of beliefs out there. There was a fascinating piece of work that said: Well, what about people's beliefs? How does this impact the way they respond to training? And one study doing a particular block versus random training program asked all the participants before they were randomized into the different arms of the study what did they think was going to give them the best results. Overwhelmingly they all said block practice.

Gil: Yeah.

Bob: They asked them at the end of the study what did you think was going to be the most successful. Without telling them what the results were, just at the end of their sessions they said: Okay. Now, what do you think? And they all said block practice. The reality of the study was the random people did much better in retention and error reduction out in the future. And the only hook in this whole thing is some recent research that's not about block practice the way I've described it, but somewhat the way Gil was describing it, and that is small blocks with increasing difficulty, and although there are not many studies, it looks very much like random practice when you watch the people out in the future.

In the paper I sent Gil, I said: I'm talking about somewhere between 20 and 25 and 40 shots and no more than that as a mini-block, and there's no number to rely on here. There are just isn't enough data. It's not sitting there and doing a hundred. That's for sure; but something small and then moving to greater difficulty and then maybe later on after two or three other variations of difficulty coming back to the one you started with, just as Gil just described. That looks very much like random practice in terms of retention of quality of improvement as well as error reduction in the future.

Gil: Now, I know I've got two of you on the line. I don't know whether Max is on the line; but I think it was two years ago that Ben and Shane and Max came and shot with me for a couple of days, and I'm going to refer to the morning where I backed you-guys up across the parking lot out into the field and my son drives up and says: What the hell are y'all doing back here?

And I looked at him and I said: We're breaking targets. And he had a range finder. Remember, Shane and Ben, how I had you-guys back up to 91 yards and y'all were all breaking targets, a left-to-right crosser at 91-yards? Do you remember that morning?

Shane: Yes, sir.

Ben: Oh, yes.

Gil: And you remember what led up to that? We were doing random blocks of training on that shot, and we kept going forward and backwards and forwards and backwards and backwards and backwards and forwards, and then we finally just said: screw it. Let's go back over there.

And I know you were all shocked when you hit it. You tried not to let on how shocked you were; but I could tell you were both shocked at that. Do you remember that?

Shane: I remember it, and I also remember we did the same thing on that teal.

Gil: Yes, sir.

Shane: We didn't back up as far across the parking lot; but we were out there 65 or 70 yards breaking that teal, and we did exactly the same thing. We shot it close. We shot it from the right. We'd back up 35 yards and move over to the left. We'd go back to the center and go back up 15 yards behind the trap, and then we'd go to the right and back up to 45 or 50 yards, and we were doing the same exercise on that bird, as well.

Gil: And that's what Bob is talking about about this study, and that is that just simply repeating it over and over again, although it grows myelin, it doesn't give you retention. Am I saying that right, Bob?

Bob: Yeah.

Gil: It does grow myelin and it makes the circuit fire faster; but it doesn't give you the retention that shooting it randomly does. Is that right?

Bob: Correct, and applying that to variations on that in the future that you may not have practiced.

Gil: So if we were to shoot it for 200 shots in the same place, we'd be great at the end of the practice session; but if we went to a tournament the next day and had to shoot it from an entirely different position, we wouldn't be able to draw on that practice session as well as we could have drawn on a practice session that was more random from different spots going backwards and forwards, up and back, long and short even though we didn't shoot 200 shots at one place. If we shot 75 or even 50 from random positions because our brain had to figure out the new position, the retention in our ability to break the shot at the tournament would be greater from that than shooting 200 shots at the same place.

Bob: Yes.

Gil: Is that what we're saying?

Bob: That's right. That's correct.

Ben: Hey, Gil? This is Ben. And I just wanted to comment. I liken that a lot to shooting the bird, you know, say, from one position in the cage but three different breakpoints.

Gil: Yes, sir. I think Bob would agree with that. Wouldn't you, Bob?

Bob: Yes.

Gil: Because it's not the fact that you hit it; it's the fact that you had to go through the mental process of diagnosing what you had to do and call on a different set of circuits in your brain in your prelude to hit that target because everybody knows the brain can do it once it figures it



out; but in order for you to retain and recall it, you have to give it different scenarios so that it has to figure out the puzzle enough times to figure out what to fire the circuit in.

Would that be right, Bob?

Bob: Yes. The more cells that are interlocked together because of problem solving, the more you are able to solve variations on the problem in the future.

Gil: Man, I'll be looking for some examples of this in your practice. I'm excited about this. I know that when Bob sent this to me back in October and I read it, I took it into Vicki's office and shut the door, and I said: We've been doing stuff so right; but I just didn't realize it. And she looked at me and said: Okay. Who else is agreeing with you now? When I said Snowflake, she said: Bullshit. No, she didn't say that. She didn't say that.

But I have to tell you that we have seen this so many times all over the world. We've just seen it. You can sit there and do it over and over again; but you don't retain it, and actually in reality we stumbled into it. We realized if we had them shoot the same shot over and over again, the next day they couldn't hit it; but if we had them shoot variations of the same shot, the next day they were so much better at shooting those shots. It just is an amazing thing. Anyway, it gives us the courage to go on and keep doing what we're doing.

### Experienced Shooters Offer Advice for Beginners

Gil: So that said, I'd like to talk the next little bit on what you-guys think, and just say your name and we'll start talking about it; but this segment is for the beginners who are just now joining the Knowledge Vault for a CD for them to listen to about maybe it's what you didn't learn as a beginner that you had to go back and learn.

I had Doug and Shane help me and Vicki with this last year. We spent some time together, and I'm about 37 pages into writing a beginner, intermediate, and advanced program for our Knowledge Vault that talks to people about what they need to learn and why and where they need to search it on the Knowledge Vault, and I'm defining as a beginner as a person who can shoot 50 percent to 68 percent.

So I'm just going to kind of throw it open. The first thing I'd tell them is don't even think you're ever even going to be able to play this game at a moderate level if you can't move and mount the gun without thinking about it. So the gun mount is paramount. Would y'all agree that learning to move and mount the gun is perhaps the most important thing you're ever going to learn if you're ever going to enjoy shooting this game?

Shane: Absolutely.

Jeff: I'd I would agree with that, and I would say that's one of the things you're going to end up learning twice.

Gil: I think that's a good point, Jeff. I really do because you may learn it more than twice.

Ben: And you learn it different for different scenarios, as well. I mean if there's different mounts.

Gil: Yes, you do. And that goes back to the random practice that Bob was talking about, and that is you've got to know which way to do it, and you get the people that say: Well, I'm just going to shoot with a mounted gun. And I think I shocked my wife the other day in a clinic when somebody said: Well, I shoot with a mounted gun. And I just said: Well, you're screwed.

Now, we had their money, you understand; but that guy looked at me and he said: But I can shoot with it mounted.

And I said: No, you can't.

And he said: Well, what do you mean?

And I said: Because in order to know that you've got it mounted, you've got to look at the sights, right?

Well, yeah.

I said: If you look at the sights of where you call pull, guess what you're going to look at when the bird and the gun come together?

I don't know.

The sights.

You've got to learn to move and, like Craig said years ago, you got to dance with that gun. You got to put your time in to dance with that gun. So I think learning the move and learning the mount is paramount for any beginner. Art Rhomberg was not going to be able to be on tonight; but he sent me a little email when I sent out the blast about what we're going to talk about, and he said, to quote Art: "Don't ever let that damn bird get ahead of that damn gun."

So that's something that as a beginner I think you'll struggle with; but if you'll learn the three-bullet drill and the flashlight drill and learn how to move and mount the gun and see the bird behind the barrel, I think your ascension into the higher levels of expertise will be much more rapid.

Anything else? What else do you think that the beginners need to give emphasis to?

### There Are No Shortcuts

Shane: Gil, this is Shane.

Gil: Yes, sir.

Shane: You know, I think one of the things that they have to realize early on is that there are no shortcuts, and I think a lot of people, it's almost like a lot of coaches are afraid to tell people

that are just getting into it that there is not a shortcut. You cannot candy-coat that. There is no easy way.

There are a lot of things you can do to increase the pace at which you can excel and climb the learning curve; but it's not any different in my opinion than when you look at someone that is playing any sport at a high level, whether it's a guy walking through the halls in high school or in college that's carrying a football or you see the guy that's always playing basketball. He eats his lunch and he goes in the gym, and after school he's playing basketball, and on the weekends he's playing basketball and he's good at basketball, and I think that a lot of people think that they can almost read their way into being a better shotgunner, and there's no substitute for trigger time and learning how to use that tool, and there's a ton of people out there that are looking for the, I almost want to say the magic pill.

Well, if I take this blue pill, I'll be really great at crossers or if I take this green pill, I can hit droppers. There are absolutely no shortcuts, and there is nothing that you can do, other than go do it and practice it and learn it, and I think that if there were people that would preface that right upfront with a lot of the people that are coming into the sport, it would stop a lot of the discouragement that you see because people, instead of looking inwards and looking for a way to improve and become better people, it almost seems to me like they get frustrated and they get dejected and then they just want to walk off from it because they thought that they were going to get into this and in six months they were going to be awesome.

I think that there would be a lot more people in the sport today if they were told from the very beginning that this is not something that you're just going to do for six months and be great at. You don't get up in the morning and suddenly find yourself the top brain surgeon in the world. The guy that played in the NFL didn't just wake up one day and get drafted and go to the NFL. The dudes that are driving race cars 200 miles an hour didn't just, you know, get a driver's license at 16 and six months later they had their professional racing license.

And I don't know why people are so afraid to apply that to this except for the fact that a lot of people that are coming into the sport are not young people. These are successful individuals. And I almost feel like people are doing them a disservice because they don't tell them upfront what they're getting into. It's almost like they're afraid to scare them instead of just telling them upfront if you're not willing to dedicate this much of your time and this much of your money and your extra efforts to doing this, then you're not going to get the results you're after.

You preach the move and mount and you preach to learn how to shoot, and it's almost exactly like you were talking about, the guy that said: Oh, well, I shoot with a mounted gun. That guy is blowing you off because he doesn't think that he needs to go home and stay in the bedroom with his shotgun and learn how to point it with a flashlight at the end of it. He already thinks that he knows better than you. You understand what I'm saying?

Gil: I do. I see it every day.

Shane: And I just think that there ought to be a paper that you could just give them, you know, that just says: Okay, upfront, this is what it is. And I think the other thing is a ton of people, I almost think that no one has explained to them how much in to themselves they're going to

have to look to be able to reach the top to get to that level, and how much they're going to have to grow as a person, and there's just as many hours spent driving down the highway, staring at a windshield in reflection, trying to figure out what is holding you back as there is crossing targets and dropping targets and things shot. You know, everybody will tell you: I can trust a coach. I can trust this guy. Yes, I trust that guy. I've known that guy for 25 years. I trust him with my life; but how many of those people trust themselves and how many of those people can be honest with themselves?

Gil: Honest with themselves is huge.

Shane: Yeah, and I think those two things are the two things that if, when you sign up for the NSCA, some dude called you and said: Okay. You have to listen to this infinite --

Gil: Do you have what it takes?

Shane: Yeah. But I'm serious, because I think that they need to understand that if all you want to do is go out and shoot two rounds of five stand and put your gun in the truck and burn a sausage and drink a six pack of beer with your buddies, that's one thing; but if you really think that you're going to show up and be a stud with a shotgun because you paid Gil Ash, I spent this much money with Tom Mac or I spent this much money with this guy over here or whatever, you know, it's not going to happen. I mean, you're going to be lighter in the wallet; but you're not any closer to being good with a shotgun than you were when you showed up.

Bob: Shane, it reflects back on four pages in Golf Flow where he describes the difference between mastery and ego.

Gil: There you go, baby.

Shane: Absolutely.

Gil: There you go, baby.

Shane: Absolutely. To me that's the two biggest things that I try to tell everyone, because I have a lot of people come to me and they're like: Well, what is it that you think sets the top 10 or 15 percent out from everyone else? And that's the two things I tell them, is that there's no shortcuts. And when I started, I thought I was just going to shoot and shoot and shoot and I was just going to get there faster than everybody else, and that is wrong. It's not going to happen; but it's coming. And I just think that everyone would get a whole bunch of their frustration and unrealistic expectation out of the way if someone would have those conversations with those people right upfront. If they understood that going in. I have several friends that are Level One and Level Two NSCA instructors, and there's absolutely nothing in that curriculum about that.

Gil: Huh-uh.

Shane: No one even wants to talk about it. I'm a Level Four NSCA instructor. Great. But all you focus on is how to teach that guy to hit that target that he can't hit that day, and you're not teaching them. All you're doing is you're like the little boy with his finger in the dike. You're just going up there and sticking your finger in the hole and plugging it up so they can hit the target

with you while you're standing there, and every one of us knows in six weeks that same shooter can't hit that same target.

Gil: That would be block practice.

Shane: Yes; but, I mean --

Gil: That's what they teach you in the program.

Bob: There's another version of that called block head practice which is what he's alluding to.

John E: Wait, wait, wait. I have that copyrighted.

Gil: Is that Sheep Eagle?

### What Are You Willing to Give Up?

John E: Yes, this is John Eagle, and I would say there's a couple of things that early on about what Shane was talking about. The only reason I go back to Gil and Vicki is because of something that I read right at the start, and the question was: What are you willing to give up to get better?

And to me that was the most sensible thing because it implies you're going to have to give something up; but I think if I was going to tell somebody from the beginning, the conversation that we've had a lot over the last year, is that you're going to have questions. You're going to have things that you can't do yourself; but the most important decision you're going to make is who can help you, because everybody has an opinion. Everybody says they're an expert; but unless they have somehow stumbled on the answer to that particular question, unless they are exactly at your level of expertise, unless they shoot exactly the same way with the same gun speed or unless they're aware of all those factors in that they really are a really good coach, probably what you're getting is not going to help you.

Gil: Say that another way in a little more blunt way.

John E: Most people, if they're not at the same moment you are in shooting a particular target -

Gil: They don't have the same amount of experience you've got.

John E: Yep, they don't have the same amount of experience and they don't shoot the same way you do. A lot of their help is not going to be helpful.

Gil: Let me see, I want you to either agree or disagree with this statement.

John E: Okay.

Gil: If you're a D-class shooter and you go take a lesson from a master class shooter, are you going to be able to implement what he tells you?

John E: He could be a good teacher; but probably not, just as you've stated it.

Gil: Okay. All right.

John E: No. I have to qualify that; because I think there are some truisms; but if you don't have somebody that can say something in a different way, I'll go back to the discussion that was just on the Knowledge Vault. Keep your eye on the ball. Keep your eye on the ball. Okay. I heard that 4,000 times in my baseball career, and it wasn't until 3,999 of them had gone back that I even started to know what that meant.

Gil: Have you read my post on that thread?

John E: I have.

Gil: Okay.

John E: And the thing is that people can say the right thing, and you don't understand it.

Gil: The right thing the wrong way.

John E: Exactly. And I can tell you that 99 percent of the time when people are standing outside the cage and what you hear, how much of you heard it? You know? Oh, you're behind that one. They can't see the shot stream. They didn't watch you shoot the target. They have no idea.

Bob: That's it.

Shane: I've got to say this just because I experienced this on Sunday. I was shooting with two other guys. The guy was an A-class shooter, pretty decent but getting smoked by a quartering target that turned into a crossing target. I could see he was starting his gun behind the target and he was finishing his gun behind the target.

He never was anywhere near the target, and the other guy that we were shooting with was trying to be helpful. Oh, you're in front of it.

How do you know that? Oh, I can see his watch.

I said: He's not in front of it. I'm not going to say anything to him because he didn't ask, and it's not my place to coach him; but I can see the shot stream. I can see the target. I can see the gun. None of them were ever in the same ZIP code together.

And they're telling him that, and it was three or four stations. Oh, you're behind it. You're in front of it. You're doing that. You're doing this. I'm just minding my own business in the corner because nobody asked my opinion, and I'm not going to give it, and I know from my own personal experiences how distracting it can be when somebody tries to help you when you're having troubles; but it's exactly to that point.

If you don't understand, if you can't see what the shooter is doing and understand how they shoot and understand how to teach them to shoot, you're never going to connect with them. You're never going to deliver useful information. It's sort of the generalization of if you're a B-class shooter and you go to an A-class instructor, I would argue, frankly, that the guys who have shot longer have a better chance of understanding different shooting methods and might have a better chance of coaching a beginner shooter; but at the end of the day, if you can't teach it

and you can't deliver that information to them in a way that they can understand it, they're never going to go anywhere and it's going to do a lot more damage, right? This was a four-pair station. The guy got progressively farther behind the station and screwed up his move progressively worse each time because of the information he was getting from the guy standing behind him.

Gil: Is this the same guy that said, dude, if that target was pulling a 20-foot trailer, you would have centered the trailer?

Shane: No, different stations. I was thinking real hard about saying that.

Bob: Getting back to your question, if I could, I think that what has been discussed is very important. One of the next steps is they have to learn how to use their eyes.

Gil: I couldn't agree more. I couldn't agree more. I think I've told everybody on this call this very same thing, and we've had thousands of people tell us this, and that is that they read the Fix-It Book. They go through three classes. They read the Fix-It Book again and it's like they never read it because the same words mean something different, and as you go through the levels of proficiency in this game, the same words mean something different simply because you can apply that at a higher level. Focus in the beginning is physiological focus on the target.

It's just like, John Eagle, in that post that I talked about when I talked about focus ratios. Do you remember that?

John E: Yep.

Gil: And there's not a lot of people that can understand that post; but you-guys that don't know, it's on the forum under Kevin. Kevin put a post up there about how do you look at the target, and I started out doing a real short answer. I don't know why; but I just ended up writing a whole chapter right there for some reason. It's not like me; but I did it anyway.

I talked about focus in the beginning being actual acute focus on the target, and in the end game it's more concentration on inferring that once you understand how to focus then you have to begin to focus visually; but you also focus mentally at the same time, and focus becomes you, you don't have to work to focus anymore. It's an automatic thing, and it's just you've moved to a different level.

Now, I'm going to try to summarize what John Eagle was saying. So many times as you're trying to get better, if you see a guy that can shoot better than you, you go ask him what he's seeing, the problem with that is you can't see what he sees without having the same number of targets broken over the gun, because what he sees or perceives is based on not what his eyes see; but how much experience his brain has in interpreting the situation that he's in and that he finds himself in and that he predicts on how he's going to get out of it. That's why, when beginning shooters go to a top shooter to get a lesson, I feel sorry for them because they can't do it. Now, the top shooter can put them in block practice and get them to shoot the same shot over and over again and they'll feel good; but when they leave they haven't learned anything.

Would you agree with that, John Eagle?

John E: I would. I think a couple of things. The practical situation is a beginning shooter has to learn how to politely say: Thank you very much, and either disregard or file away whatever information they've gotten, because if you tell a guy: You're just plain wrong, that upsets the squad and upsets your day. And so you really do have to learn. I mean, it's like how much lead. Three feet is the answer, you know. You have to have something ready for that.

Bob: Yeah. It's the old question of why were you where you were, not where you were.

Gil: There you go.

John E: Exactly. And so you have to learn when you really need help and what kind of help you really need.

Gil: Hum.

Bob: Boy, that's a huge degree of internal reflection and being able to replay against some standard that you've developed in the past to be able to pull that off, and I think that's beyond most people.

John E: Okay. I might have to agree with that.

Gil: Oh, reluctantly.

John E: No, no, no, not reluctantly at all. I think it would be better to say that you just can't listen to everybody.

Gil: Go see Gil and Vicki. Go see Gil and Vicki. They know what they're talking about.

John E: There are limits even there.

Jeff: Can I tack something onto that?

Gil: I want you to.

Jeff: I don't know if it was in the same paper; but if it's not, it was in another paper that I sent you. There was a study done about people's perceptions and willingness to accept solutions to problems and even their willingness to define a problem, and a lot of it had to do with their ego and what the solution was to the problem, right? If the solution was unpalatable, they were less likely to acknowledge the problem or they were more likely to define the problem in a different way so that the solution was something palatable.

Now, the article was all about climate change and politics, and it's pretty heated in terms of today's discussions about the political perspective on climate change and all of that sort of stuff; but the fundamental research, I think, applies here, too, because it's some of the stuff we talked about earlier.

He's not willing to admit that fundamentally the answer to his need to improve is that he has to practice and he has to do the basic blocking and tackling that's necessary to learn all the basic parts of his skill set. He'd much rather go out and buy a new tote or ask a great shooter: Oh, well, if you shoot a certain way, that's what I should shoot because obviously that'll make me



better because you do it, and there's a lot more behind that answer than just that's what I shoot. You know, he's a more skilled shooter. He has more time. He has more experience, whatever; but people want to take the shortcut because that's the palatable answer. That's the thing that connects with their ego and allows them to say, you know, if I buy this thing or I do this shortcut, I'll be able to skip ahead. Right? I mean, we heard three or four different definitions of the same thing; but there's definitely some people talking about research that points to that as part of your ego.

Gil: Yeah. And the paper you sent me applies directly to the gun mount situation because if a person looks at learning to mount the gun as something that he doesn't want to do, he is never going to admit that the root cause of his mental inability to hit that target is because he can't mount the gun. That doesn't exist in his mind because the solution is not palatable to him. So he's not going to admit or give credence to the fact that that is his problem. He's going to always look in other areas when the simple thing is, hey, dude, learn to mount the gun. Right, Jeff?

Jeff: Exactly. There's so many comic routines, and I believe even some- one once said sometimes the simplest explanation is the answer; but, you know, there's always, you know, history of all of these desires to have some complex explanation for a simple problem. So, yeah, I would agree with that completely.

Bob: Yeah. Occam's razor.

John E: Let me change mine just a little. I want to remind you of Mencken's statement which was, for every complicated problem there's a perfectly simple solution and it's always wrong.

Gil: Always wrong, yes.

John E: But for Dr. Bob, I agree. And so I would say is to go from a beginner shooter to an intermediate you must know that you are going to need help to do that.

Gil: Oh, yeah.

John E: It certainly saves a lot of money on your shooting expenses.

Shane: Yeah, the more chokes and the titanium chokes.

Gil: Yeah. And we've talked about it on this coaching hour hundreds of times. They're looking to buy their way to the next target, and you're not going to do that. You're just absolutely not going to do that. It's going to take hard work and it's going to take a certain amount of time, and you're going to have to give something up. Just like I told John Eagle, What are you going to give up? And he looked at me like I had three noses. I said: No, dude, you don't come to this game with an empty dance card. You're already doing 25 hours worth of stuff in a 24-hour day, and you've got to give something up, and it's a difficult thing for most people to fathom.

One of the things that I talked about in the preamble to the beginner, intermediate, and advanced program is why you do this. If you were to come me today and say: I want to take this game up and I want to get as good as I can get, the first thing I'm going to say is: What are you going to give up? Then I'm going to say: Okay, how much time do you have to devote to it and

just how good is good, and you're not going to know the answer to those questions because you're not going to know how long it's really going to take.

But one of the things that I'm going to ask you is how long do you see yourself doing this, and there's really only three answers: I don't know or until I decide to quit or get tired of doing it, which really means is until your ability to handle the amount of failure to really get better runs out or the amount of effort, time, and money it's going to take to get better exceeds your commitment. The third answer is for the rest of my life. The people that will freely admit that this is something that they might want to do for the rest of their life are going to excel much more quickly, and they're going to look at this as something that they're going to slowly get into and learn well.

I have to tell you without exception the shooters that we've had come to us and say we want to do this the rest of our life or it could be something we could do the rest of our life, we're looking at it from that standpoint, those are the people who have been methodical. Those are the people who have learned well what they've learned. Those are the people who have not wanted to take the shortcut.

They've come back for lessons. They call us when they have a decision to make. We talk about not only decisions in sporting clays, but we talk about decisions in their personal life. We talk about everything. We help them become honest with themselves, and those are the people that say this may be something I want to do for the rest of my life. There's something about that rest-of-my-life commitment that makes them want to learn well everything that they learned at every level, and that common thread is there, I must tell you. It is there. And research will prove me out. I've read several papers on that.

So we're out of time. I find myself thoroughly enjoying this conversation. We're probably going to do this again next month. We'll talk a little bit more about beginners because you're all going to listen to this and think of something else, and we're going to lead in with beginners next time, and then we'll talk a little bit more about the intermediate shooters and what they have to learn in order to stumble around where everybody gets caught the most, and that's in the intermediate phase, and what they have to learn to get into the advanced phase. Then, the next month, we're probably going to talk about when you're in the advanced phase what you actually have to learn to actually compete at the top level.

So thanks, everybody, for participating. You've made this hour wonderful for us. I enjoyed it and goodnight, everybody.