

Goal Setting: Training for that Big Match

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The shooting season is upon us. Shooters from all over the country who are planning to compete in a major local event, state event, or even at Camp Perry this year are starting to, or have already started, to train for the big event. Most of us have either just thought about it (started to train mentally), or have actually developed a plan and began to implement it in some form or fashion. Goals have been set, refined, established, or just pondered. Goal setting is a difficult process and seldom implemented correctly in the training process.

We have all heard the different goals set by either ourselves or our friends:

"I want to break 2600 this year."

"I am going to get a gold medal in the Leg Match at Camp Perry this year."

"I am going to win my category/class this year."

"I am going to shoot a better score this year than I did last year."

"I am going to make the President's 100 list."

"I am going to shoot my personal high score."

Here is a key thought to remember and stick with: If your goal is a number, or it can be affected by another person, then it is not a good goal.

Back in 1991, GySgt Andy Moody, the Center Fire National Match Course record holder with a 300-19x, told me a story. He told me that all year, he had been working on his goal for Camp Perry that year. He told me that he was going to shoot a 290 or better during the National Trophy Individual (NTI) match. You see, normally, a 290 would almost guarantee you a win during the NTI. At least that was the case for the last few years. His hidden agenda in all of this was that if he accomplished his goal, then he would be the NTI match winner. He trained all year with intermediate goals within the strings of fire every time he got up to the line to shoot. He had MINIMUM scores to shoot at every yard line. 95 or better during the slow fire stage, 98 or better during the timed fire stage, and 97 or better during the rapid fire stage. In his mind, he had it licked!

Guess what he shot at Camp Perry that year? Correct!....he shot a 290. He met his goal. He did not, however, accomplish what he really wanted to do. He was not the match winner. Someone shot a 291. I often wonder what goals the other shooter had. In this case, we had a National record holder actually limiting himself to a particular score. Someone with his abilities should have just relied on his capabilities and focused on the immediate task at hand: to shoot each shot or stage of fire to the best of his mental and physical ability. That would be, "almost flawless." At that time, he was one of the best shooters on the line at any given event! Why did he limit himself and allow his self-image not to exceed those

numbers?

His lesson to me was: "Do not make a certain score or number as your goal if you want to be the match winner. Why? Because that might not be the score required to win that day. The best performance that day wins."

Performance: that was my lesson learned. How do I alter my goals and training in a manner which will allow my best performance, at whatever time I want to produce it? A good or flawless performance is obviously one with the least amount of errors or none at all. To do this, I needed to reinforce an almost flawless routine. What is a flawless routine? Can I identify that? Can I assess that? Can I implement that? Here is where Goal Setting begins!

Everytime a shooter comes to the line to shoot, he or she should have some sort of goal. If it is at training or practice, what are the goals for that particular session? These would be your daily goals. Perhaps to refine your mental plan, to fix a common error, to simply shoot 10 good shots, or even to keep all the shots in the repair center. No matter what, never shoot without a purpose. I have heard people say that to get better, one has to "bury themselves knee-deep in brass." You can shoot all day without a purpose, and all you have accomplished was to send lead down range. A medium or intermediate goal can be to master to 25-yard line, to have established a good routine, or perhaps to shoot well enough to make your local or state team. All of this would assist you in acquiring your ultimate or long-termgoal: to get that High Master card from the NRA (just an example).

Always assess every training or practice session at its conclusion. What did I learn today? What did I do wrong? What am I going to do with what I learned? What am I going to do to fix what I did wrong today? Why am I doing this wrong?

If there were good points about your training sessions, write them down and decide how you are going to incorporate them into your routine. Ask yourself how you will continue to do those good things.

Examples of good goals are:

1. I will eliminate anticipating any shots today.
2. I am going to pay close attention to trigger control today.
Pressing the trigger to the rear while maintaining the best sight alignment possible.
(eliminate jerking the trigger)
3. I am going to stick to my routine (mental plan/program) for the entire day.
4. I will put on the best performance I ever have.
5. I will identify, assess, and correct my errors.
6. I will successfully implement a solid routine in my shot process.
7. I will learn to be aware enough during a shot and only shoot shots that I am prepared to shoot.

8. While in the shot process, I will stop if I veer from my routine and start again.

Try to set goals that are positive in nature. Make a serious attempt to eliminate any negatives in your goals such as; "I will NOT shoot any late shots." This will only improve your chances of doing just that. Also, set goals that cannot be affected by anyone else, and see if they are realistic or not. I know I could not set a goal to win the next

Olympics, or set National Records, if I just started shooting yesterday. Through practice, I will learn to assess and readjust my goals.

Does practice make perfect? What if I don't know if I am doing something right? What if I can't really identify, assess, and correct my errors? If I continue to train in this "lost" state, is my flawed practice making me or my routine "perfect"? The answer is obvious: NO. Perfect practice makes perfect. That is a series of goals in itself. Identifying errors, assessing errors, correcting errors, and finally implementing and refining a new routine. That is crucial! This applies to both the mental and physical aspects of your shot process. One has to work on making his or her sessions "perfect." What you do to accomplish this should be your short-term goals. Intermediate goals are designed when you have identified an error and you work to fix it. An Ultimate goal should be one that truly measures your overall performance. Perhaps an errorless performance would be a good Ultimate goal for you. To achieve that certain performance at the time that you need it most is a goal not easily achieved.

If I don't have a clear understanding and mastery of the fundamentals, I have no business setting goals other than those types of goals that will allow my self-image to believe that I have mastered the fundamentals. Then we can proceed with a higher level.

Many shooters go straight into studying Mental Management and some even the art of Zen. To me, this is crazy since they have not harnessed the application of the fundamentals in their shot process. It is like expecting a driver that just got his or her driver's license to outperform a NASCAR Professional at the Daytona 500. These are two complete ends of the spectrum. A systematic approach to success has to be developed. Success is relative. To me, to have an almost errorless day at the range is success.

Can you imagine your score at the end of the match if you completed the match without errors? By that, I mean that you did not jerk the trigger once, you didn't hang up on any first shot during rapid fire, you didn't shoot a shot that you didn't want to shoot, or you never veered off of your mental plan or mental program (your routine). Establishing goals such as these and meeting them, will equate to a good performance and eventually achieving levels that perhaps even you didn't think you could achieve.

In my opinion, Lanny Bassham has written the best material to understand this process. In a book he wrote, titled "With Winning in Mind," he describes the "Triad State" as the state in which your sub-conscious mind, conscience mind, and self-image are balanced. He goes on to describing how one can acquire this balance through perfect practice and mental program (routine) development.

Recently, I talked to some competitors at the Marine Corps Western Division matches about this very subject. This particular event is a three-week event. Classes are given during the first few days, then practice at the pistol and rifle ranges, and 4 days in match conditions. I

noticed that a number of shooters kept making notes of the scores they shot every day. When I asked some of them as to why they were doing it, I got different answers back:

"I want to see my progress from day to day."

"I want to find what my average score is."

"I want to see in what stage of fire I'm weakest in."

"I want to see if I'm shooting the scores required to get a medal here."

I respond to each of these with:

"Progress is not measured with scores but through performance."

"Have you identified the errors that you make each day and averaged that out in an effort to correct them and ultimately improve your average score that way?"

"Are errors more prominent in a specific stage of fire? Do your errors differ from one stage to the next?"

"How do you know what is going to take to get a medal? What if there will be adverse weather conditions that day? What if the weather was really bad the years prior and recorded bad scores. What you need to identify, is what sort of performance is going to get you in the medal bracket."

The discussion continued in form of explanations to my answers. What if the wind was blowing really hard, and some rain added to the variables around me? What if I had an Olympic level performance as far as my mental state, state of awareness, effort, etc.? If the conditions were different, would my score be the same? I don't think that would be likely. I can put on the same type of effort from one day to the next, but that does not mean that the scores are going to be equal. There are so many variables and conditions to take into account to worry about a score. The key, again, is consistency in performance. Make a serious attempt to eliminate the errors. Stick to your task at hand. That should be to meet your immediate goals. Stick to your routine! A performance such as that will take care of the score for you.

Good luck and keep them in the middle.

Gunnery Sergeant, United States Marine Corps

GySgt Lozoya first started his competitive shooting in the Marine Corps Western Division Matches in 1989. He was shooting for the Marine Aircraft Group 13 shooting team out of Yuma, Arizona. He did not place with either the rifle or pistol during that event.

The following year (1990), at the same event, he was the Western Division Pistol Champion and earned his way to the Marine Corps Championships in

Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He earned a bronze medal at that event and was selected to augment the Marine Corps Pistol Team as a member of the Summer Team for that year.

The following month, he earned another bronze medal at the Interservice Championships held in Camp Robinson, Little Rock, Arkansas.

At the 1990 National Championships in Camp Perry, Ohio, he was third overall during the National Trophy Individual Match, earning a gold medal and a Pistol Distinguished badge.

He returned to Yuma, Arizona to assume his regular duties as a Computer Operator. Later that same year, he received orders to Weapons Training Battalion, Quantico, Virginia and assigned to the Marine Corps Pistol Team.

During Desert Storm/Desert Shield, he was a combat weapons instructor in Stone Bay, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

In 1991, then Sgt Lozoya, was back in Quantico with the shooting team. This would be his first year as a permanent member of the Marine Corps Pistol Team. The Highest achievement that year was winning the Regular Service National Championship in Camp Perry, Ohio.

In 1992, Sgt Lozoya was the Virginia State Champion and match winner at the West Virginia State Championship. At Camp Perry, Ohio that year, he set a match record during the .45 caliber pistol match with a 891-57Xs, was the Regular Service Champion, and National Champion.

He was also the match winner during the Presidents Match for which he received a congratulatory letter from President George Bush. He was meritoriously promoted to Staff Sergeant for winning the National Championship.

In 1993, SSgt Lozoya won the National Trophy Individual Match in Camp Perry, Ohio.

In 1994, SSgt Lozoya was again the Virginia State Champion. During the Marine Corps Eastern Division Matches, he set a Division Match record with the M-9 shooting a 581 aggregate (that record still stands today).

He then won the Marine Corps Championships earning the coveted Walsh Trophy badge.

In 1995, SSgt Lozoya was the only Marine in the U.S. military team, which participated in the First Military World Games in Rome, Italy.

Currently, GySgt Lozoya, is stationed in Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California and assigned as a Legal Officer. He is distinguished with both the rifle and the pistol.