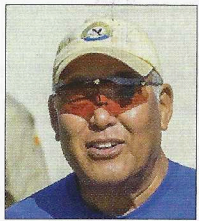


# RENEW YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR SHOOTING

Have you found that your long-time squad just isn't what it used to be, or that the buddies you used to practice with have are no longer around as much?



▲ John D. Shima

A phenomenon called “friendship recession” can occur following the loss of connection to a shooter’s long-time squad. It’s characterized by a decline in the number and quality of interactions at the shooter’s usual gun club. The recession is due to a variety of factors:

- *Changes in the shooter’s season of life.* Some members develop physical ailments or serious medical conditions, move away, or die.
- *Varying levels of seriousness or competitiveness.* Some members of the squad gravitate toward casual shooting with light-hearted banter, while others become intensely focused on scorekeeping and competition.
- *Communication breakdowns.* A lack of open communication or unresolved conflicts can erode trust and camaraderie within a squad due to disagreements about correct shooting techniques.
- *Changing priorities and circumstances.* Individual lives evolve. Shooters experience changes in their personal lives and work schedules, they pursue new interests, or family commitments become a priority.
- *Feeling unappreciated.* If a member feels there is a lack of appreciation for their contributions, or their efforts are marginalized, it can lead to resentment.
- *Lack of effective leadership.* The designated squad leader mismanages group dynamics or fails to provide clear direction or to resolve disagreements among squad members.

Often, shooting simply no longer provides the emotional rewards it once did. Then, several years later, things have changed, and the individual begins looking to fill the void that shooting once filled. Shooters facing this dilemma are faced with two choices: They can find another squad that allows them to reclaim whatever they once enjoyed, or they can pursue a different relationship with shooting.

- *Find a new skeet squad.* There are a few options for shooters to find a new squad. They could sign up for leagues at their gun club, fill an open space on a squad in a registered shoot, or join a partial squad.

- *Discover a new relationship with shooting.* Sometimes shooters who were once highly competitive discover they can rekindle their passion for the sport by mentoring others, learning to become an instructor, adopting another shotgun sport, or simply shooting with friends for social reasons.

I have helped many clients renew their enthusiasm for shooting during my career as a master instructor and pseudo-counselor. I’ve always said that individuals shoot clay targets for different reasons. It is common for many of those same individuals to eventually change their relationship with the sport as they progress along their shooting journey.

My Shima Shooting Experience<sup>SM</sup> sessions seem to be an ideal venue for shooters to discover options that rekindle their joy of shooting clay targets. My three-day SSEs combine skeet and sporting clays instruction among a collegial squad of supportive participants who develop close relationships through their shared experiences.

During a recent SSE, I had the pleasure of

working with two long-time competitors who I helped develop a new relationship with shooting. Both Murrell Smith and Craig Roberts wanted to help novice shooters enjoy the clay target sports as much as they did. Too many well-meaning instructors tell new shooters how they should shoot based on the experienced shooter’s perspective. Murrell and Craig are learning how to provide appropriate suggestions and encouragement based upon the student’s perspective. The goal is to make each outing an enjoyable experience.

Far too many people approach a clay target sport with enthusiasm and quit within a few months out of frustration. Experienced shooters have a wealth of knowledge to share with new shooters. We need to make an effort to help newcomers so the sport we love will survive for future generations. *CTN*

▶ John Shima is a five-time World Skeet Champion. To view previous articles or order John’s books, go to [www.johnshima.com](http://www.johnshima.com).