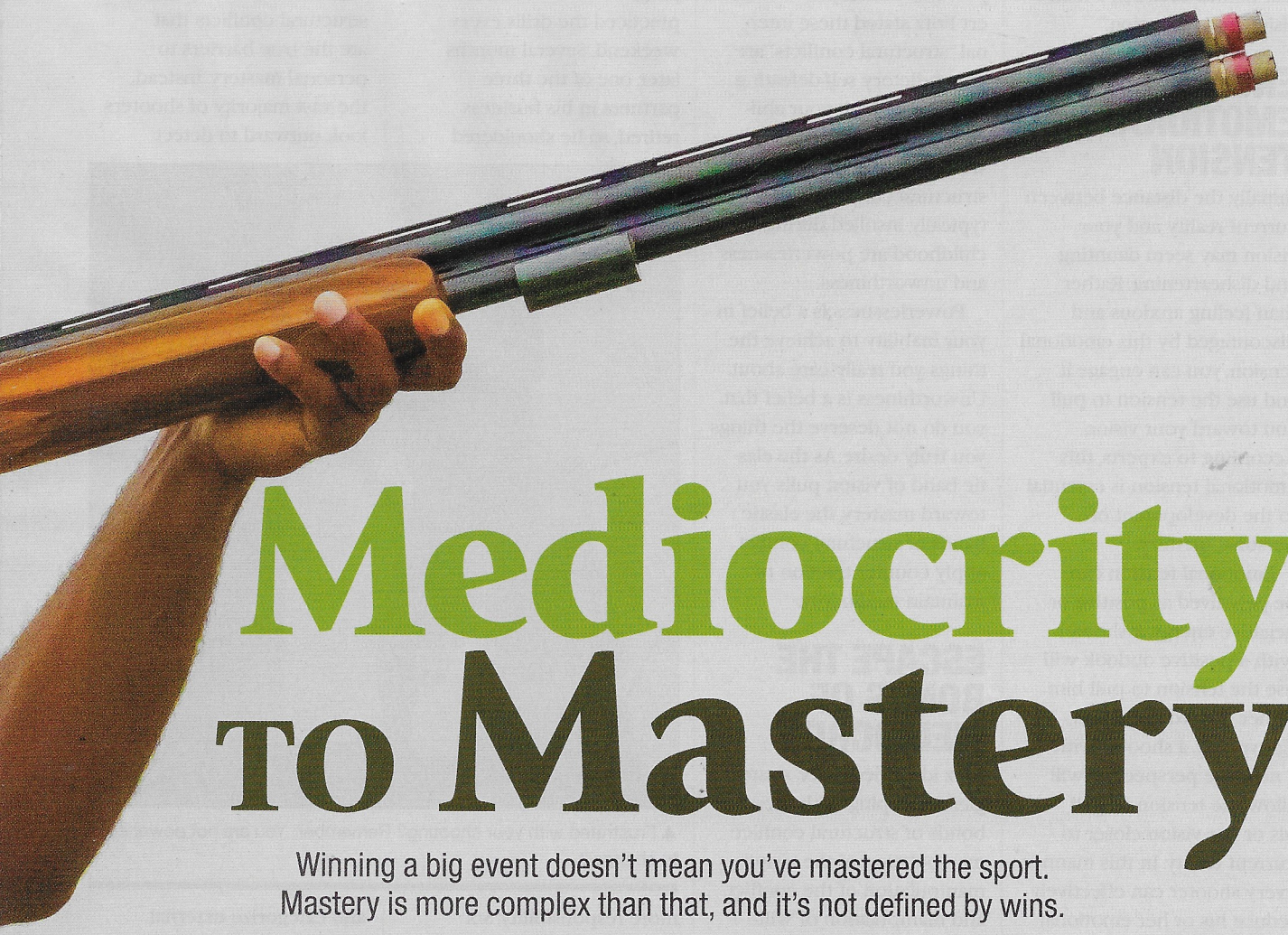


Mediocrity to Mastery

Winning a big event doesn't mean you've mastered the sport. Mastery is more complex than that, and it's not defined by wins.

BY JOHN D. SHIMA

In his bestselling book *Good to Great,* business consultant Jim Collins explained how a company could make the leap from average to outstanding. Collins and his research team of more than 25 assistants spent five years accumulating and analyzing data to discover that these companies achieved greatness through disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action.

I apply similar principles to skeet and sporting clays when a mediocre shooter wants to pursue mastery. It is necessary to exercise visual and mental discipline, as well as lots and lots of practice. However, as I explained in my second book, *A Method for the Magic*, making the right effort to do the right things the right way can help shooters progress from mediocrity to mastery.

Goals are necessary to pull you forward. It takes a clear vision to give your goals direction and a sense of purpose. I've stated that the right vision is the key to setting the right goals. The right goals help you build a solid foundation of self-confidence. I've also written that shooting on purpose is essential to satisfying the need for socialization and/or self-actualization. Although purpose is necessary to provide a sense of the right way, your vision is what defines the destination. I paraphrase Peter Senge when I say, "Purpose without vision is like driving without GPS." It doesn't matter whether you are going slow or fast if you don't have a clearly defined destination.

Shooters sometimes confuse a desired outcome in a major competition with a vision of mastery. Unfortunately, attaining goals are merely waypoints on the journey to mastery. Mastery is bound to an internal value or scoring system — it is not determined by external factors like winning a coveted trophy or shooting certain scores. It is a clear vision that distinguishes people with high levels of personal mastery. As my ancestors said,

"When there is no break, not even the thickness of a hair comes between a man's vision and his action."

ENGAGE EMOTIONAL TENSION

Initially, the distance between current reality and your vision may seem daunting and disheartening. Rather than feeling anxious and discouraged by this emotional tension, you can engage it and use the tension to pull you toward your vision. According to experts, this emotional tension is essential to the development of personal mastery.

Emotional tension can be perceived as positive or negative energy. A shooter with a positive outlook will use the tension to pull him or her toward the vision. Conversely, a shooter with a negative perspective will allow the tension to pull his or her vision closer to current reality. In this manner, every shooter can effectively reduce his or her emotional tension. However, allowing the emotional tension to pull your vision closer to your current reality comes with a price. As the writer Somerset Maugham said, "Only mediocre people are always at their best." This means that the road to mediocrity is paved with compromise.

IDENTIFY SELF-DEFEATING BELIEFS

Too many shooters wallow in the frustration of their current reality. The external struggle to overcome mediocrity usually fortifies your internal barriers to achieving personal mastery. Author Robert Fritz stated these internal "structural conflicts" are contradictory self-defeating beliefs that limit your ability to create what you really want. The two predominant structural conflicts that are typically instilled during childhood are powerlessness and unworthiness.

Powerlessness is a belief in your inability to achieve the things you really care about. Unworthiness is a belief that you do not deserve the things you truly desire. As the elastic band of vision pulls you toward mastery, the elastic bands of structural conflict apply counter traction to maintain mediocrity.

ESCAPE THE BONDS OF MEDIOCRITY

Fritz identified three strategies for coping with these bonds of structural conflict: manipulation of the vision, manipulation of the conflict, and manipulation of willpower. Only one of these generic coping strategies has the potential to lead you from mediocrity to mastery.

Manipulation of the vision - The most convenient strategy shooters use to reduce or eliminate the discomfort of emotional tension is to reset their vision to a lower level or postpone their dream indefinitely. Circumstances may change during your shooting journey to make the vision less of a priority. Five years ago, one of my clients came to me with a vision of consistently shooting hundred straights. We designed a personal shooting development program for him and he practiced the drills every weekend. Several months later, one of the three partners in his business retired, so he shouldered more responsibility. Six months later, his wife developed a rare and rapidly deteriorating neurological condition that required a great deal of his attention and personal care. My client finally accepted that his skeet vision was creating too much emotional tension and needed to be changed so he could just enjoy shooting at this stage in his life.

▲ Frustrated with your shooting? Remember: You are not powerless to change it.

Manipulation of the conflict - This is the most common strategy shooters use to avoid doing things they need to do so they can do things they want to do. These shooters avoid the truthful introspection that is necessary to identify and eliminate the internal structural conflicts that are the true barriers to personal mastery. Instead, the vast majority of shooters look outward to detect and categorize external circumstances that can be fixed. My father manipulated the conflict by blaming his vision. Every time he experienced a less than ideal performance in competition, he would schedule an appointment with his eye doctor to have his vision examined and obtain a prescription for new shooting glasses. Other shooters focus on gun fit and patterning the gun or changing to a gun with a different rib height, barrel length or length of pull. Again, these shooters are doing things they want to do to justify avoiding what they

need to do.

Manipulation of willpower – Most elite shooters will attribute their success in the clay target sports to willpower. These shooters are highly motivated to do whatever it takes to overpower any barrier that arises between them and their vision. In a phrase, the ends justify the means. However, the downside to manipulation of willpower is that there is little economy of the means to achieve the goals. Unfortunately, for many shooters, the enormous amount of effort and resources expended to achieve the dream has unintended consequences. If the vision is not founded on a worthy purpose, the shooter leaves the podium wondering if it was really worth it — or more likely, what is the next goal? Manipulation of willpower may be effective in achieving your dream, but the victory is hollow if the underlying structural conflicts remain unaltered.

COMMIT TO THE TRUTH

The central theme of my first book, *The Moment of Truth,* was based upon an anonymous quotation: "The vision to see, the faith to believe, and the courage to do." In seeking the truth, you must look within yourself to see how your self-defeating beliefs limit your shooting potential. By doing so, it is possible to develop the faith to believe in your natural shooting potential and the courage to exercise the willpower necessary to make the right effort to do the right things the right way.

The self-deception that external circumstances are responsible for your inability to achieve personal mastery makes you a prisoner of your structural conflicts. Peter Senge stated that it is necessary to develop a "relentless willingness to root out the ways we limit or deceive ourselves from seeing what is, and to continually challenge our theories of why things are the way they are… It also means continually deepening our understanding of reality… [and] see more of the structural conflicts underlying [our] own behavior."

EMBRACE THE ESSENCE OF MASTERY

Whenever I watch Bruce Lee perform martial arts or Kristi Yamaguchi skate on the ice, I marvel at their ability to accomplish extraordinarily complex tasks with grace and ease. Experts remind us that individuals with exceptional levels of personal mastery have developed a higher level of rapport between their conscious awareness and their adaptive unconscious. While most observers take the seemingly effortless grace of these elite performers for granted, the truly great performers are intently focused on what they are doing instead of how to do it.

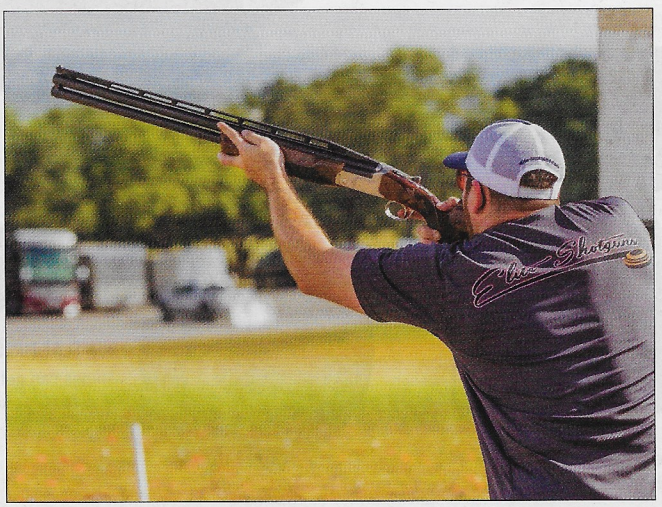
According to author Malcom Gladwell (*Blink*), the adaptive unconscious is the automatic mind. The ability to transfer as many elements of a complex task to the automatic mind as possible is the essence of personal mastery. It is generally accepted that mindfulness is the right way to develop a deeper rapport between your conscious mind and your adaptive unconscious.

Mindfulness is a state in which the conscious mind is quiet. When the mind is quiet, the vision is not easily distracted. A quiet mind allows a shooter to acquire the target and watch it intently until it breaks. While in this quiet state of mind, you will be able to break clay targets effectively, efficiently and effortlessly.

Shooting a certain score or winning a coveted trophy does not ensure the realization of personal mastery. Those external factors are usually the byproduct of developing personal mastery. Knowing what is truly most important to you is essential to setting the right goals toward which to aspire.

The discipline to develop a deep rapport between the conscious and unconscious minds is more important than developing a strong willpower to control your conscious mind. Peter Senge emphasized that the key to developing high levels of personal mastery comes back to the discipline of developing a clear vision of what emotional need requires fulfillment.

Mastery is not a byproduct of success, but success is always a byproduct of mastery. Personal mastery empowers a shooter with the ability to overcome his or her internal structural conflicts and achieve a sense of peace and spiritual fulfillment.



▲ Your vision and goals might change over the years as your life circumstances change. This does not mean you've accepted mediocrity — only that you're in a different place than you once were.

Embracing mastery will enable you to begin your shooting journey with the right vision and exercise the willpower necessary to make the right effort to do the right things the right way. CTN

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