

ATTITUDE GUIDELINES

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If you would like to improve your mental and physical performance on the field start by asking yourself three questions. Do you approach your shooting sport with the correct attitude? Does your attitude contribute more to your successes or to your failures? What are you doing to improve your attitude? Perhaps the following story will provide you with a better understanding on how these questions relate to performance.

A little while back, during a weekend training session, one of my athletes was having a poor day. We were out on the skeet field running through some training exercises for International skeet when it started. Bobby started the exercise with a good attitude and began breaking targets. However, towards the end of the 25 targets he started to miss some targets he should have been breaking. During the next 25 targets he missed even more. After each miss he would slump his shoulders, throw the empty hull to the ground and say something like, "Jeez, not again!", or "I can't hit that @\$%& thing". From then on it was like a snowball rolling downhill, gathering disappointment, anger, and self pity every time target flew on after the shot. By the end of the third round he was considering giving up the sport. When we finished for the day we spent some time talking about how to get back on the right track, and when we left the range Bobby felt better, but was still disappointed with his performance.

During the next week I analyzed what went wrong during the training session and determined which fundamentals had been forgotten, resulting in the missed targets. What bothered me most was Bobby's reaction to his performance. We were training to make him a better shooter, maybe someday a champion, but the better shooters don't act that way when things go bad. He had acted like a brat. I decided that a strong lecture on his attitude might be in order at the next training session, and I began to plan what I was going to say.

Then it hit me! The reason why Bobby had a poor training session was my fault. How could I expect Bobby to deal with his performance when I didn't let him know what was expected of him. I had failed to give him the guidelines he needed to cope with the setbacks he experienced that day. Not only that, he had never agreed to live by these guidelines, so how could he be held accountable for them. If I lectured him on "my" expectations it would be unfair. It was time for a new approach.

When we met again the following weekend we talked about what had happened. Bobby wasn't proud of the way he had acted and wanted to avoid doing it again. I introduced him to five Attitude Guidelines and we discussed each one. As we went over each rule,

Bobby thought about how well his attitude during his past performances met each guideline. Follow along and ask yourself the same question.

WHEN I'M ON THE SHOOTING FIELD I EXPERIENCE A FEELING OF JOY.

How many times have you approached the training field or competition match with a feeling of dread? Have you viewed the experience as an ordeal? Have you ever prepared to start shooting with fears running through your thoughts? Did you ever leave the field disappointed? Compare those feelings with your best days. The fun you had. How enjoyable and easy your performance was. How excited you were. See the difference? Fears and joy cannot exist in your thoughts at the same time. Stop the negative thoughts in your mind from spoiling your performance. When you focus your mind on your enjoyment of the moment there is no room for doubts and fears. Practice feeling good when you shoot. Tell yourself how lucky you are to be shooting such a great sport. Program yourself to be successful.

ONLY MY COACH CAN CRITICIZE MY PERFORMANCE. I FOCUS ONLY ON THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF MY PERFORMANCE.

Stop talking to yourself about your performances in a way that demeans or ridicules your self worth. You would be too polite to speak that way to someone shooting with you, why do it to your best friend, © yourself. We tend to be too tough on ourselves while we are learning new skills. Let your coach decide whether you are on the right track or not. By focusing on what you are doing right you will learn new skills faster than if you just think about what you are not doing right.

I THINK AND TALK ABOUT ONLY THOSE ACTIONS I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE HAPPEN.

In the language of computers they have a phrase, "Garbage in - Garbage out". When you talk about missed targets, how many times you failed in the past and your fears of future failures, what kind of thoughts are filling your mind? Negative thoughts! How do these help you achieve good performances? They don't! They hold you back. Talk about what you want to have happen. Forget saying "I can't do it right". Say "I'm getting better; soon I'll be doing it perfect". Focus on the end result. Focus on your goal. Fill your thoughts with encouragement for better performance.

I DISPLAY ONLY POSITIVE EMOTIONS AND USE THEM TO RE-ENFORCE PERFORMANCES WHICH MEET OR EXCEED MY GOALS.

We can all remember events from our past. Some are good like a birthday party, or prom night, a special gift or the return of a loved one, and some are bad like the loss of a friend, a serious injury or the consequences of the trouble we got ourselves into. However, while we can remember events like these we can't seem to remember what we had overdue library book. Our ability to remember past events is measured by the amount of emotion

we experienced at the time. The more emotion, the more vivid our recollection. When we throw hulls, get mad at ourselves, and display anger we are putting emotion on poor performances. This helps us remember them. Are these the kind of performances we want in our mind? Absolutely not! Put the emotion on the good stuff. Make those events foremost in your mind.

MY OWN SELF DISCIPLINE MAKES THE FIRST FOUR GUIDELINES WORK.

Bobby is lucky because he has a coach to help guide him as he learns, but what will make Bobby successful is not his coach. It will be his own self discipline. To you, this means, ***on your own*** you will do the things necessary to get the job done. ***On your own*** you will keep the right thoughts in your mind. ***On your own***, you will choose the path that leads you away from failure and towards your goals. Take responsibility for your actions. Only ***you*** can provide the determination needed to keep you on track.

Once Bobby and I discussed each guideline at length, Bobby agreed to make those guidelines part of his training. He is now back on the right track. He has a different attitude on the field and the little setbacks that occur don't affect him as much. He sees every training challenge as a way to improve, not as a barrier to hold him back. Each one of you should consider these guidelines and make them part of your game.