

Reinforcement - article by Lanny Bassham



Concentration is nothing more than the control of one's mental picture. Remember, the Subconscious Mind, with all its power, moves you to do whatever the Conscious Mind is picturing. If you can control the picture, you can control the performance. Our conscious picture is formed from what you think about, talk about and write about.

The Principle of Reinforcement: The more we think about, talk about or write about something happening, we improve the probability of that thing happening!

This is my favorite principle of [Mental Management](#). Every time we think about something happening, we improve the probability that it will happen. Be careful what you think about. What do you picture? Every time you worry, you improve the probability that what you are worrying about will happen. If you are worrying about scoring badly, the Subconscious, with all its power, will move you to score badly. It is not what you want, but it is what you will get if you continue to think this way. What you must do is picture scoring well.

Also, be careful what you talk about. I've seen the following situation hundreds of times. Two people meet at a competition. Person A asks, "How did you do?" Person B says, "I did terrible. Everything I did was wrong. I'm so upset and angry." B has just improved the probability of having another day just like this one in the future because he is thinking and talking about his mistakes. The really sad thing is that because Person A is listening, he is also improving the chance that he could have B's problems in the future. Be careful what you say and whom you listen to. Unfortunately, the culture of sport is often negative. It has become acceptable to talk about mistakes. Do not spend time listening to the problems of others, or you will soon inherit their problems. Your Self-Image is moving you toward what you are reinforcing if you are thinking and talking this way. It is becoming like you to make mistakes.

I was once asked, "Mr. Bassham, in the 1978 World Championships, you shot a 598/600 to win a medal. What happened on those two nines?" I answered, "Do you really want to know? Do you want to know how I got those nines? That will not help you. You don't want to know how I got two nines. What you should be asking is how I got 58 tens. Besides, I can't remember how I got the nines. I do not reinforce bad shots by remembering them." You should talk about your good shots to improve the probability that you will have more good shots in the future.

Be sure to write down what you want to happen. Years ago I had the pleasure of teaching the Canadian Olympic Shooting Team. In one of the seminars, I remember telling the shooters that it has always been my habit to write down my goals as if they had already been accomplished. At the break, one of the pistol shooters, Linda Thom and I were visiting about

her goal to become the 1984 Olympic pistol champion. At age 8, she was taught to shoot by her father. In 1970, she competed at the World Shooting Championships in Phoenix, Arizona and finished in the Top 10. This, by the way was my first World Championships. Despite Linda's achievements, she decided to focus her attentions elsewhere, taking a seven year break from shooting. In 1982, it was announced that the Ladies Pistol Match would be an Olympic event at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Seeing a chance to reach Olympic victory Linda returned to shooting and was on the Canadian National team attending the session I was teaching. One thing I said to her was that you must write it out your goals. In Canada and the United States too, shooters rarely write our goals out. We're a very literate society otherwise, but we don't seem to write down our goals.

One of the most important things I've found useful is to write out the goal in the first person, present tense. I told her to write, "I am the 1984 Olympic Gold Medalist in Ladies Match Pistol. Write it out in your journal every night, be disciplined to stay with it, and one of two things will happen, either you won't believe it and you'll stop writing it, or you'll keep on writing it and you'll succeed." It really works. Although Linda had a journalism degree, she didn't particularly like sitting down and writing out her goal but she did made the effort. For 18 months she wrote that she was the Olympic Champion, every single night in her journal. Linda came back to the sport with a single goal in mind; win the Olympic Gold Medal. She did just that and became the first woman to win the Ladies 25m Pistol Gold Medal. What makes this even more special is that Thom's win also marked the first gold medal by a Canadian since 1968 and the first female individual gold medalist since 1928. She told me repeatedly writing down her goal helped her build her self-image as a champion.

Be careful not to complain. I often hear people, in business as well as sport, complaining about their circumstances. Complaining is negative reinforcement. I teach my students not to reinforce a bad performance by getting angry. Do not reinforce a bad day at the by complaining to your spouse. Remember something that you did well each day instead. Fill your thoughts only with your best performances and you will be successful!

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