



Paying Attention

It's okay for your mind to wander between stations —
as long as it wanders back in time for the next target.

BY JOHN D. SHIMA

During the last day of the 2015 Western Open in Stockton, California, I was straight in the .410 into the last box. As I was walking to lead off on station 6, I saw Todd walk by. I knew his squad was shooting the same flight and wondered how they could be finished so far ahead of our squad, because we weren't that slow. With that thought on my mind, I stepped onto station 6, called pull and missed the H6 target. I went on to finish with a 99.

When I was in my 20s, random thoughts never affected my shooting like they do now. Upon reflection, most of my misses occurred in the third or fourth box during competition. As my Aussie friends say, "My mind takes a wander between stations." That's okay, but sometimes it doesn't get back in time for the next target.

One of my close friends and squad mates is severely ADD. Many of my clients, young and old, have been diagnosed with ADD. Some of these individuals use medication to help them concentrate. Although I have dyslexia, I was never diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. But I can certainly empathize with shooters that suffer with ADD, because as I've gotten older, I find it difficult to consistently focus my attention on every target during competition.

I believe ADD is a far greater liability for a skeet shooter than most medical conditions, because once the issues of gun fit and shooting mechanics have been mastered, success in the clay target sports relies heavily on visual and mental discipline. Hence, the game of skeet becomes rather monotonous and boring.

ATTENTION INCONSISTENCY

The book *Driven to Distraction* by Drs. Edward Hallowell and John Ratey explained that the symptoms of ADD could vary from ordinary daydreaming to almost constant distraction and hyperactivity. They estimated that ADD affects 18 million Americans. One of the important takeaways from this book was that many individuals affected by ADD are also enthusiastic, intuitive and creative.

A clinical diagnosis of ADHD/ADD is based upon an individual's inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Many individuals lack the hyperactivity component, so their ADD is often more subtle and

ADD, the attention deficit is not so much a disorder, like dyslexia, as much as a circumstantial problem. Most individuals with ADD, like Mozart and Einstein, are able to hyper-focus at times on certain topics but are easily bored and succumb to daydreaming or distraction at other times. When ADD is viewed from this perspective, *we all suffer from ADD at times*. For this reason, Drs. Hallowell and Ratey prefer to classify ADD as "attention inconsistency" rather than a psychological disorder.

Individuals with ADD tend to avoid activities that require long periods of mental concentration. Understanding ADD from this perspective helped me realize that indi-

they realize it is only necessary for them to focus on the target for a few seconds at a time on each station. Once they develop the ability to turn their hyper-focus on and off, the skill can be used in other areas of their life. Allowing shooting clients with ADD to be distracted between stations is actually necessary rather than encouraging them to follow a rigid mental discipline during the entire round.

Hyper-focus is an intense form of mental concentration or visualization that centers concentration on a task. This relates to the psychological concept of *flow*, which elevates performance of the task at hand. For many individuals with ADD, their ability to hyper-focus on every thought sidetracks them from the task at hand. People with ADD seem to lack thought discrimination, so they are highly susceptible to distractions.

From my perspective, shooting a round of skeet varies from a brief periods of hyper-focus to longer intervals of distraction and boredom between stations. I have so much trust in my pre-planned moves that I still believe I can overcome most distractions when I'm on the station because they never affected my shooting when I was in my 20s and 30s. Intellectually, I understand that I was much more motivated to hyper-focus on each target when I was younger than I am now. I know how much mental effort it takes for me to hyper-focus on each target to run a 100; I also understand that my priorities are different at this stage of my life, so it is easier for me to accept the easy 99s.

There is a delicate balance

between hyper-focus and distraction or boredom. When I attempt to isolate myself from external distractions by turning off the microphones in my headset, I actually find the complete lack of sound activates more internal distractions because I can't hear anything going on around me. I discovered that sensory deprivation aggravated my tendency to get bored during a round. I like to hear what my squad mates are saying during a round.

OVERCOMING BOREDOM

It is impossible to feel highly motivated to achieve a specific goal and be bored at the same time. I was highly motivated to shoot 100x100 when I was younger because it truly pleased my Dad to watch me win shoot-offs. Since he passed away, my greatest challenge as a competitive skeet shooter is overcoming boredom during the last box of each event.

I am relatively consistent at running the first box in competition. When I am shooting well, the dropped target will usually occur in the last box. This is when I get bored and allow my mind to wander, which in itself isn't a bad thing. But I still take it for granted that my hyper-focus will just appear, without any extra effort, when I step onto the station. So when I tell my clients how to overcome boredom, it is a "do what I say, don't do what I do" admonition.

Life coaches and psychologists state the best way to overcome boredom is to acknowledge that it is an issue



▲ Forget trying to stay focused on shooting for an entire round — for most people, it can't be done.

difficult to diagnose.

I am using ADD as a topic for this article because inattention and distraction seem to cause many clay target shooters to make careless mistakes. It dawned on me that when shooters try to stay focused on shooting during an entire round, it actually causes them to be more susceptible to moments of distraction on the station.

For most individuals with

viduals with ADD are much better suited for sporting clays than skeet. Regardless, I have several skeet shooters as clients that vary in age from teenagers to mature adults. I approach their training differently, because they find methodical exercises like the Incomer Drill too boring.

Although skeet might be more difficult for shooters with ADD to master, it also can be very therapeutic when

when it arises and develop an appropriate response to manage it. There are several options for shooters to consider when boredom creeps into their shooting game:

MOTIVATION - When I was highly motivated to shoot well to please my Dad, it was automatic for me to be hyper-focused before I called

This cannot be done by rote; it must relate to the present moment. The visual image of the next target emerging into your peripheral visual field must include the existing background to demonstrate what you are able to see, not what you want to see. Visualization awakens the area of the brain that man-



▲ Distractions are inevitable. Don't fight them — acknowledge them, then dismiss them and refocus before you call for the target.

for the next target. The next target was the only thing that existed between the shoot-off and me. Now my motivation for entering competitions is to shoot along with friends and celebrate their performances.

INSPIRATION - The creativity and introspection required for me to write these magazine articles and my books has actually inspired me to focus more intently on my shooting than I have during the past 20 years. The mental stimulation of reflecting on how I shoot rather than just going through the motions of shooting has certainly had a positive effect on my scores during the past few seasons.

VISUALIZATION - The process of visualizing the next shot is an essential component of the pre-shot routine.

ages your shooting reflexes. Kinetic visualization actually enhances awareness of what you expect to see and feel during the next shot.

AWARENESS - Awareness is a state of readiness to react and respond to whatever occurs in the present moment. Although awareness includes the shooter's present actions, thoughts, feelings and surroundings, there is no attachment of emotion or judgment associated with them. In this manner the pre-shot routine is much like a mantra that prepares you to enter a state of mindfulness. Settling the eye in expanded soft focus at the eye hold quiets the mind and helps you to get ready to detect and acquire the next target. Although you may be aware of thoughts, sensations and your shooting

spirit during training sessions, you must avoid analyzing them during practice and competition, because they will distract you from simply watching the next target.

PAYING ATTENTION

In the battle to overcome boredom, the fight is not between inattention and attention; the battle is between *consistency* and *intrigue*. Every competitive shooter knows what is necessary to consistently break targets. I previously referred to the process as monotonous visual and mental discipline. But it's difficult to consistently adhere to a process that is too simple to be intriguing.

Experts say that your abil-

ity to pay attention is a bal-

ance between your *attention mode* and your *daydreaming mode*. Since paying attention and concentration require mental energy, it is essential to let your mind wander between stations to re-charge your ability to maintain your attention mode on the next station. Mental grinding between stations actually depletes mental energy and shortens your attention span during the next shot.

Several of my clients with ADD discovered that skeet shooting became therapeutic for them once they understood the concept of duality (two minds) and the role of self-talk. Dean, a client in Honolulu with severe ADD, told me after two years of semi-annual clinics, "Despite years of counseling therapy, no one told me I had two minds and didn't have to react to every thought in my head. Your shooting method has made me a different person, not only on the skeet field but also at home and at work. Instead of being frustrated, shooting skeet your way has changed my life!" **CTN**

▼ Extreme motivation can drive out boredom and improve focus.



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