

TRUST THE SHOT

A Practical Guide to Letting Your
Subconscious Take the Shot



Howard Piper

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Author's Preface

Why I Wrote This Book

Howard Piper

This book was written first and foremost to share my testimony about my faith in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. He is God's Son, and through Him you can have eternal life with God.

All it takes is a prayer to God: confess that you are a sinner, ask forgiveness of your sins, and ask Jesus to come into your heart and be Lord of your life. It is that simple, and it costs you nothing.

Jesus died on the cross to pay for all our sins, once and forever. He rose from the dead after three days, showing that He defeated death. Through Him, we can spend eternity with God.

If we do not know Him as Lord and Savior, we are already condemned. When we die, we will spend eternity separated from God rather than eternity with Him. We can choose eternal life with God, or do nothing and remain separated from Him. I hope this is the time you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and receive the promise of eternal life with God. I know you want that for your family, and they want it for you as well.

The rest of this book is about sporting clays - seeing the target clearly, moving without hesitation, and trusting the shot. But beneath those lessons is a greater truth I have learned in my own life: when we place our trust in the right place, it changes everything.

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Introduction

There is a moment in shooting that most people experience at some point, even if they don't fully understand what happened when it occurred. It may last for an entire round, or it may appear only for a few stations, but when it does, it stands out in a way that is difficult to forget.

The targets look clear in a way they don't always look. The background seems to fall away, and the bird separates itself from everything around it. Your eyes find it easily, without searching, and once they are there, they stay there. There is no effort in holding focus, no sense that you need to work to keep the target in view. It is simply there, and you are simply seeing it.

At the same time, the movement feels natural. The gun does not feel heavy or light. It does not feel like something you are trying to control or guide into position. It moves with you, or more accurately, it moves as part of you. You are not aware of mounting it or steering it. You are aware only of the target and the motion that follows it.

Your movements are fluid and smooth as you move to the target and then the shot happens. Not because you decided it was time. Not because you measured the lead or confirmed the picture. It happens within the movement, at a moment that feels right but was never consciously chosen. The target breaks cleanly, often more cleanly than you expected, and for a brief moment everything feels complete. There is no tension. There is no correction. There is no question.

It just works.

And then, just as quietly as it appeared, it disappears. The next time you step into the station, something feels different. The targets do not stand out in quite the same way. The movement feels slightly less connected. The shot feels like something you are participating in again, instead of something that is simply happening. You begin to think. At first, it is subtle.

You might notice where the gun is in relation to the target. You might wonder if you are a little behind or a little in front. You might try to be more precise, more careful, more certain. And with each of those small adjustments, the shot becomes heavier.

This is where most shooters begin the search. They try to understand what changed. They replay the good shots in their mind and try to figure out what they did differently. They look for something they can repeat, something they can control, something they can build into a system that will bring that feeling back. They study their mount. They study their feet. They study lead. They study timing. They study hold points and break points and technique. And all of those things have value. But they are not what created that moment.

That moment happened because you were not interfering with the process. Your subconscious is capable of doing far more than most shooters allow it to do. It can read the target, interpret its line and speed, coordinate your movement, and recognize the correct moment to shoot, all in a continuous flow that does not require conscious control. It does not need to calculate. It does not need to confirm. It responds.

But it can only respond when it is allowed to. The conscious mind works differently. It observes, evaluates, decides, and then acts. That process is useful for planning, for learning, for discussing, and for understanding what happened after the shot. But it is too slow and too deliberate to manage the shot while it is happening.

When you bring that kind of thinking into the movement, you interrupt something that was already working. You begin to check the gun. You begin to measure lead. You begin to decide when to shoot. And in doing so, you replace a natural process with a controlled one. This is why your best shooting never feels controlled. It feels free.

This book is not about teaching you something new to add to your shooting. It is about helping you recognize what is already there and understand why it works when you allow it to work. It is about seeing the difference between

control and interference. It is about understanding how vision, movement, timing, and trust all come together when they are not being managed piece by piece. And most importantly, it is about learning how to return to that place when you drift away from it.

Because you will drift. Everyone does. There will be times when everything feels right, when the targets look clear and the shot happens without effort. And there will be times when nothing feels quite the same, when the movement feels disconnected and the result is inconsistent. The difference between those two states is not ability. It is attention.

Where your attention goes determines how the shot unfolds. When it stays on the target, the process works. When it shifts away - toward the gun, the lead, the timing, or the result - the process begins to break down.

Everything in this book leads back to that idea. You do not need to become a different shooter. You do not need to learn something completely new or replace your shotgun. You need to recognize what works, understand why it works, and allow it to happen more often. Because in the end, the goal is not to chase a perfect shot.

It is to trust the shot you already know how to make.

CHAPTER 1

The Shot You Remember

There is a shot you remember. I remember several. One was a quick shot with a new 20 gauge when I wasn't ready to shoot. I shot anyway with barely enough time to get the gun to my shoulder and fire before the clay disappeared. I hit it to my surprise and the surprise of others. Most shooters have similar stories. So how did we do it? Read on.

It may not have been your highest score, and it may not have happened in a tournament, but it stands out clearly in your mind. It is the kind of shot that, even now, you can re-play without effort. The target appeared, you saw it clearly, the gun moved, and it broke in a way that felt almost effortless. You didn't think about it. You didn't measure it. You didn't guide it. It just happened. The gun just seemed to know where to go and when to fire. And that is a great feeling.

And afterward, there was a moment - maybe only a second or two - where something felt different. Not excitement, not surprise exactly, but recognition. You knew that shot was right in a way that went beyond simply breaking the target. You may have even asked yourself, quietly, "Why can't I do that every time?"

That question is where this book begins.

Because every shooter has had that experience at some point. It may show up for a few stations, or it may last for an entire round, but when it happens, it feels unmistakable. The targets look clearer. The movement feels connected. The shot happens without effort. And then, just as quietly as it appeared, it disappears.

The next time you step into the station, everything looks the same. Same gun. Same targets. Same intention to shoot well. But something feels different. The targets don't stand out quite as clearly. The movement feels slightly less certain and the stress begins to move in. A target you should have broken easily sails on untouched, and another one breaks,

but not with the same confidence. Before long, you find yourself thinking again. You start asking questions.

Was I too far behind? Did I check the lead too much? Did I rush that one? Do I need to be more careful?

And with those questions, the round begins to feel heavier. Not because the targets are harder, but because you have stepped into the process. Most shooters believe that improvement comes from adding more. And so, the analysis begins. Do I add:

More knowledge. More control.

More focus on the target in flight. Tighter grip on the gun. More awareness of every part of the shot.

They study lead, timing, hold points, break points, and technique, believing that if they can just understand enough, they will be able to produce consistent results. And to some extent, those things matter. They give structure to the shot. They help you make decisions before the target is in the air. But they are not what produces your best shooting. Your best shooting happens when you stop interfering with what already works.

That may sound strange at first. It may even feel like the opposite of what you have been taught. Because it sounds like you are being asked to do less at the exact moment when you feel like you should be doing more. It sounds like you are giving up control or leaving something important to chance.

But that is not what is happening. What is happening is that you are allowing a different part of yourself to take over. Your subconscious is capable of far more than most shooters realize. It can read the target, interpret its line and speed, coordinate your body, position the gun, and recognize the correct moment to shoot - all in a fraction of the time it would take your conscious mind to process the same information.

It does not need to measure lead. It does not need to decide when to pull the trigger. It responds to what it sees, continuously adjusting while the shot is happening. But it can only do that when you allow it.

When you begin to think your way through the shot, you interrupt that process. The conscious mind is too slow, too

deliberate, and too focused on control to handle something that must remain fluid from beginning to end. It wants to check the gun. It wants to confirm the lead. It wants to choose the exact moment to fire. It wants to make sure that everything is exactly right to make the shot and break the target.

And by the time it makes that decision, the moment has already passed. That is why the shot that felt perfect did not feel controlled. It felt natural. There was no time to think but only react.

A simple comparison helps make this clear. Think about riding a bicycle. When you first learned, balance was something you had to think about. You were aware of every small movement, every correction, every wobble. You tried to control it consciously, and the ride felt unstable because of it. We all felt the pain when we did it wrong and ended up on the ground in front of our friends. There are no natural bicycle riders. We all had to learn the same way.

Then, at some point, something changed. You stopped trying to balance the bike. And suddenly, you could ride. From that moment on, balance was no longer something you thought about. It was handled automatically, without effort. You can now enjoy the ride. Your subconscious was now making the decisions on how to keep you upright and balanced.

If you tried to go back and control it the way you did at the beginning, you would feel awkward again almost immediately. Shooting works the same way. The shot you remember - the one that felt effortless - was not the result of doing more things correctly. It was the result of doing fewer things unnecessarily.

You were not checking the gun. You were not measuring lead. You were not trying to decide when to shoot. You were seeing the target, moving with it, and allowing the shot to happen. That is not a rare or special moment. It is the way shooting works when it is allowed to work.

The problem is not that you don't know how to shoot that way. The problem is that you don't trust it enough to let

it happen consistently. Most of us were taught that way of shooting. So, you step in. You try to help. You try to control. And in doing so, you replace something natural with something mechanical.

This book is about understanding that difference. It is about recognizing what is happening in those moments when everything feels right and learning how to return to that state more often. It is not about adding more technique or more control. It is about removing what gets in the way.

Because the goal is not to become a different shooter. It is to become the shooter you already were when everything felt right. You have proven you can hit the targets so that is not the problem. Your problem is trying to help when your subconscious can do it better and quicker. When we allow our subconscious to do it for us, we can enjoy the ride, or the shot.

CHAPTER 2

Seeing the Target

There is a difference between looking at a target and truly seeing it, and most shooters don't realize how much of their shooting depends on that distinction. It is easy to assume that if the target is visible, then it is being seen clearly enough. After all, if you can point the gun at it and pull the trigger, you must be seeing it. But there are levels to vision in shooting, and the quality of what you see determines everything that follows.

A simple way to understand this is to step away from the shooting station for a moment and picture something more natural.

Imagine a hunter walking slowly through a field. He is not staring at one specific spot, and he is not trying to lock his eyes onto a single point in front of him. Instead, he is aware of everything around him. He sees the field in front of him, the edges to his sides, the movement of grass in the wind, the subtle changes in light and shadow. His eyes are relaxed, taking in a wide area without focusing hard on any one thing.

This is often described as having "soft eyes." It is not unfocused in the sense of being careless. It is relaxed in the sense of being ready. Because he is not forcing his vision into a narrow point, he is able to detect movement anywhere in front of him quickly and naturally. His eyes are free to respond.

Then, without warning, a bird flushes. In that instant, everything changes. The relaxed awareness narrows immediately. His eyes lock onto the bird - not because he forced them to, but because that is how the visual system is designed to work. They see movement and focus on the movement. The bird becomes clear and separate from everything else. The background fades away. His attention is now completely on the target.

At the same time, his body begins to move. The gun comes

up to his shoulder as part of that movement. His stance adjusts. His balance settles. All of it happens in one fluid motion, not because he is thinking about each piece, but because he has done it enough times that it no longer requires conscious control. He is not looking at the gun. He is not checking the barrel. He is not measuring lead. No time for that.

He is seeing the bird. And as he follows the bird, staying focused only on it, the shot happens at the moment his subconscious recognizes that everything is in the right place. Afterward, if you asked him exactly how much lead he used, he would not be able to tell you. He might guess, but it would only be a guess. The shot did not come from measurement. It came from seeing and responding.

That is the model for how vision should work in shooting. Most shooters never truly allow that process to happen. Instead of starting with relaxed awareness, they begin with tension. They lock their eyes onto a specific point in the sky where they expect the target to appear. They stare

at that point, trying to be ready. Their vision becomes narrow and fixed, and while it may feel like focus, it is actually limiting their ability to respond.

When the target appears, they often have to “find” it rather than simply see it. There is a small delay, sometimes barely noticeable, but enough to weaken the connection from the very beginning. By the time their eyes fully settle on the target, the movement is already starting from a less stable place. From there, the problems begin to compound.

Because the target does not feel completely clear, they try to focus harder. Because the connection feels uncertain, they begin to check the gun. Because the timing feels off, they try to control the moment of the shot. And all of those traces back to the very first moment - the quality of what they saw.

Seeing the target clearly is not about effort. It is about allowing your vision to work the way it was designed. Before you call for the target, your eyes should be relaxed and aware, not locked and rigid. You are not trying to pin the

target down before it appears. You are allowing your vision to remain open so that when the target does appear, your eyes can move to it immediately and naturally.

When that happens, something important changes. The target appears clearer. Not because it has changed, but because you are seeing it without interference. The line becomes easier to read. The speed becomes easier to judge. The movement becomes easier to follow. And because of that, your body has better information to work with, your subconscious depends on that information.

It cannot respond accurately to something it does not see clearly. But when the visual connection is strong, it can begin to do what it does best - coordinate the movement without needing your help.

This is where many shooters unknowingly step in and disrupt the process. As soon as the gun starts to move, part of their attention leaves the target. It shifts, even slightly, toward the barrel. They begin to check where the gun is in relation to the bird. They try to confirm that everything is lining up correctly. That shift is small, but it is enough.

The moment your attention leaves the target, the connection weakens. The target becomes less distinct. The movement becomes less certain. And now, instead of responding naturally, you begin to manage the shot. You try to guide it. You try to measure it. You try to fix it. And the more you try, the further away the shot gets from what it was meant to be. I think we all remember those bad days of shooting that got worse the more we tried to fix, whatever the problem is?

Back to the bicycle comparison. At first, balance feels impossible. You are aware of every movement, every wobble, every small correction. You try to control it consciously, and the result is unstable. The more you think about balance, the harder it is to maintain it.

Then, at some point, something changes. You stop trying to balance the bike. Your body takes over, and suddenly it works. From that moment on, you never think about balance in the same way again. It is handled automatically, without conscious effort.

Seeing the target works the same way. When you try to control your vision, to force focus, to check and confirm, you interfere with a system that already knows how to work. When you allow your eyes to see the target clearly and stay on it, everything else begins to fall into place.

This is why the simplest instruction is often the most important:

See the target.

Not the gun.

Not the lead.

Not the result.

The target.

When you truly see it - clearly, steadily, without interruption - you give your subconscious everything it needs. The movement becomes more natural. The timing becomes more consistent. The shot becomes something that just happens, not something you have to make happen.

And when that begins to feel familiar, you start to recognize something. You have felt this before. In those moments when shooting seemed easy, when the targets looked clear and the shot happened without effort, this is what you were doing.

You were seeing the target. We all need to apply this when shooting as our default way of shooting. Like riding the bicycle takes practice to get better, so does allowing your subconscious to take the shot. Practice it until it becomes your default shooting. And when a day starts off bad, change to your default.

CHAPTER 3

Move, Mount, Shoot

There is a rhythm to a good shot that is difficult to describe but easy to recognize when it is there. It does not feel like a sequence of steps, and it does not feel like something you are building piece by piece. It feels like one continuous motion that begins the moment you see the target and carries all the way through the shot without interruption.

The target appears. Your eyes go to it. Your body begins to move. The gun comes to your shoulder (if hunting or FI-TASC)(French: Fédération Internationale de Tir aux Armes Sportives de Chasse) or (English: International Federation of Sport Shooting with Hunting Firearms). And somewhere within that movement, without hesitation or confirmation, the shot happens.

When it works this way, there is no sense of assembling the shot. There is no pause between parts, no need to check or correct. Everything is connected, and because it is connected, it feels simple. But when that connection breaks, even slightly, the entire shot begins to change.

Most shooters don't notice when this begins to happen. They only notice the result. A target is missed that should have been easy. Or a target breaks, but not cleanly, in the confident way they expect.

The instinct is to look for something specific to fix. Maybe the mount was too slow. Maybe the hold point was wrong. Maybe the lead wasn't enough. So, the next time they call for the target, they try to correct one piece of the process.

Or they start the swing earlier. Or they try to be more precise with the gun. They focus hard on the target. And without realizing it, they begin to separate the shot into parts. This is where the problem begins. Because the shot does not actually happen in parts. It only feels that way when something has gone wrong.

Think about a situation you've experienced many times. You step into the station and call for a target that you've

seen before. It's not complicated. You know where it's going. You know where you want to break it and it has been an easy shot for you in the past. Everything about it feels familiar.

The first target comes out, and you miss it. Not by much. It looked close. You might even say, "I was right there." Then you call for the next one. And this time, you break it. Then the next. And the next. Three clean breaks in a row, all on the same presentation you missed the first one.

Nothing about the target changed. Nothing about your ability changed. So, what happened? What changed was not the target. What changed was the connection. On the first shot, something was out of sync. It may have been subtle - so subtle you couldn't feel it clearly - but it was enough. Maybe the gun was not in the correct place on your shoulder. Maybe your eyes

and your body were not quite working together. Maybe your attention shifted for a moment toward the gun or the expected lead. Maybe your mind was not on the shot.

Whatever it was, the shot did not begin as one motion. It began in pieces. And because it began in pieces, it never fully came together.

On the next three targets, you didn't fix anything consciously. You didn't think through a new plan. You didn't adjust your lead or your timing. You simply called for the target and moved. And this time, everything started together. Your eyes found the target. Your body responded immediately. And because the movement was connected from the beginning, the shot had a chance to develop naturally.

Now consider the opposite situation. You step into the station and break the first three targets cleanly. Everything feels good. The movement is smooth. The timing feels right. You are not thinking about much at all. Then on the fourth target, you miss. And it feels confusing.

Because nothing changed. The target looked the same. Your plan was the same. But the result was different. What happened here is the same thing, just in reverse.

On the first three shots, everything was connected. You were seeing the target, moving with it, and allowing the shot

to happen within that movement. You were not interfering. But on the fourth shot, something small changed. It might have been a thought - "Don't mess this up." It might have been a quick check of the gun - just to be sure. It might have been a slight hesitation at the beginning of the move. Whatever it was, the connection broke. And once that connection breaks, the shot becomes something you try to manage.

This is why shooters often feel inconsistent on targets that are actually very simple. It is not the presentation that changes. It is the way the shot begins.

A good shot does not start with the gun. It starts with the eyes. The moment your eyes go to the target, your body should begin to respond. That response should begin when the eyes see the target and with a fluid motion move and shoot.

They are one motion. A hunter in the field does not mount the gun and then look for the bird. He sees the bird and moves. The gun comes up as part of that movement, not as a separate step that needs to be completed before anything else can happen. There is no pause. There is no sequence. There is only the response. Properly done, it is actually a beautiful thing to watch.

When shooters begin to struggle, they often reverse that order. In sporting clays, they mount the gun and then they look for the target before they know where they want to break the target. Then they begin to move. Each part is handled separately, and each separation introduces a delay. The shot becomes mechanical. Instead of flowing, it is built. And because it is built, it never feels quite right.

This is where the idea of "mount, see the target as you move and shoot" becomes important - not as three separate steps, but as a reminder that these things must happen together. The move begins with the eyes. And the shot happens within that same continuous motion.

If you try to control each of those pieces individually, you will always feel slightly behind or slightly out of position. You will be trying to catch up to a process that is meant to unfold on its own.

But when you allow them to happen together, something changes and the magic happens. The shot feels smoother. The timing feels more natural. And the result becomes more consistent - not because you are controlling it better, but because you are interfering with it less.

This is why the simplest direction is often the most effective. See the target. Let the gun move to the target. And allow the shot to happen within it.

When that becomes familiar, you begin to recognize something. The shots that feel right - the ones you remember - were never built step by step. They were always one motion. And when it works, it is a great feeling.

A few weeks ago, I was shooting bunker with a guy I did not know, and he was quite a bit better than me. He saw that I was missing more than I was hitting and suggested I try his gun. It was new and a beautiful gun and specifically built for Olympic Bunker Trap shooting. He and I are about the same size, so the gun fit me pretty well.

If you are familiar with Olympic Bunker Trap, it can be a humbling experience for many of us. The targets are moving a lot faster than sporting clays or American trap. You mount the gun, point the gun at a specific place on the trap house, focus out beyond the trap house, and then call pull, and you have about 1 to 1 ½" seconds to move and break the clay before it is out of range. If you shoot bunker like sporting clays, the target will be in the next county before you decide how much lead to give the target and pull the trigger. Believe me, I know this for a fact. It truly is, pull and bang.

To shoot bunker you must allow your subconscious to work for you. There is no time to make any decisions or adjustments. So, you have to learn to set up your stance and your gun consistently and call for the target then let your eyes follow the target and your subconscious make the shot. When it works, it is a strange feeling at first. How did that happen?

Back to my example. I shot his gun and I couldn't miss, much. It was as though the gun knew where to go to break the target. It was a great feeling to suddenly hit 9 targets

in a row, something entirely foreign to me, with a gun I had never even seen before. So, what was happening? I had no experience with the gun so no preconceived ideas on how to shoot it. I also didn't expect to hit a target, so the pressure was off. I just had fun and I learned that allowing my subconscious to take the shot was a lot better than me helping.

CHAPTER 4

The Plan

Before you ever call for the target, something important needs to happen, and it does not take long, but it makes all the difference in how the shot will feel once the target is in the air. You need a plan. This just means, think through what you are about to do.

Not a complicated plan, and not something you analyze endlessly, but a clear understanding of what you are about to do. Without that, the shot begins with uncertainty, and uncertainty is where hesitation lives and clays don't break.

Most shooters don't think of it this way. They step into the station, look at the target, and tell themselves they will "just see it and shoot it." Those are the ones that like the surprises. That sounds simple, and sometimes it works, but more often it leaves too much undecided. When the target appears, they are still figuring things out. They are still choosing where to engage it, still adjusting to its line, still deciding when to move.

All of that thinking happens while the target is already moving. And that is where the problem begins.

A simple way to understand this is to think about driving somewhere you have never been before. If you need to get from where you are to a destination you don't know well, you don't just get in the car and start driving with no idea of how you are going to get there. You look to a map and create a route, back when we used maps. You decide which roads to take. You know where you will turn, where you will stay straight, and maybe even where you will stop for gas or food along the way. Even with GPS, you still plan the trip, but GPS gives you a route, and you follow it.

Once you have that plan, something changes. You no longer feel pressure about getting there. You are not wondering at every intersection whether you are going the right way or missing a turn. You are not second-guessing each turn. You simply follow the plan you already made. And that

plan is one less thing to think about once you call for the target. The driving becomes easier, not because the road changed, but because the decision-making is already done.

Now imagine the opposite. You get in the car with no plan at all. You start driving and try to decide at each intersection which way to go. You hesitate. You second-guess. You miss turns. Even a simple trip begins to feel stressful because you are trying to make decisions while you are already in motion. That is exactly what shooting feels like without a plan especially, if your wife is with you.

When you step into the station without a clear idea of where you want to break the target, you are forced to make that decision while the target is in the air. Your body may begin to move, but your mind is still working. It is still deciding. Should I take the shot early? Should I let it come out a little farther? Was that the right hold point? Did I mount the gun correctly? Do I need more lead here? Those questions don't feel like much, but they introduce uncertainty and hesitation, and those affect the outcome. With this much to think about, that uncertainty slows

down the process and your focus is on making right decisions so that you can take the shot and break the target. The movement becomes less direct. The shot feels rushed or delayed. And by the time you decide what to do, the opportunity you were trying to capture has already passed and now you are shooting at less than the ideal spot. A plan removes that problem before it ever starts.

Before you call for the target, you take a moment to understand what you are about to shoot. You watch the presentation. You see where the target is most visible. You recognize where it looks easiest to break. And you choose that point. Not two or three options. One. You decide where you will see it. You decide where you will break it. And then, when you step into the station, you already know what you are going to do. Also forget those guys standing behind you. If you are shooting better than they are, they are watching what you do to learn from you.

This does something important. It frees you. When the

target appears, you are no longer trying to figure it out. You are no longer making decisions. You are executing a plan that already exists. Your eyes go to the target. Your body begins to move. And because there is no hesitation about where the shot is going, the movement becomes more direct. It becomes simpler. It becomes easier to trust and trusting the shot is everything.

Many shooters make the mistake of continuing to think about the plan after the target is in the air. They see something slightly different and try to adjust. They second-guess. They change their mind in the middle of the shot. That is the same as changing directions halfway through a turn while driving. It creates confusion and instability. The plan is not something you carry into the shot as an active thought. It is something you create before the shot so that you don't have to think during it. Once the target is in the air, the plan is done. You don't need to remind yourself of it. You don't need to check it. You don't need to adjust it. You simply follow it.

This is where many shooters begin to feel a change in pressure. Without a plan, every shot feels uncertain. There is always a sense that something could go wrong, because nothing has been decided. The shot feels like a reaction instead of a direction. With a plan, that pressure begins to fade. You are not guessing. You are not hoping. You are not reacting without purpose. You are moving toward something you have already chosen. You begin to shoot like it is practicing when there is no pressure.

And because of that, you can let the shot happen. A good plan does not make the shot complicated. It makes the shot simple. It removes decisions from the moment when decisions are hardest to make. It allows your subconscious to work without interruption, because it already knows what you want to do.

So, before every target, take a moment. Look at the presentation. Decide where you want to break it. And then trust that decision. Because once the target is in the air, your job is no longer to plan. Your job is to see, move, and allow the shot to happen.

CHAPTER 5

Timing

There is a moment in every shot that cannot be forced, cannot be held, and cannot be chosen in the way most shooters try to choose it. And yet, when that moment happens correctly, it feels unmistakable. The shot feels right, not because you decided it was, but because everything came together in a way that left no doubt.

That is timing.

Most shooters spend a great deal of effort trying to control this moment. They look for it, they anticipate it, and they try to decide exactly when the shot should occur. They believe that if they can just find the right picture - if they can see the correct relationship between the gun and the target - they will be able to pull the trigger at precisely the right time. And they assume that is what needs to happen at every station.

But that is not how timing actually works. By the time you decide to shoot, the moment you are trying to capture has already passed. You have likely experienced this many times without fully recognizing what was happening.

A target appears, you move with it, and at some point, the picture looks right. You see the lead, or what you believe is the correct lead, and you pull the trigger. But the target does not break. It continues on, and you are left with the feeling that you were just a little behind, or above, or too far in front. So, on the next target, you try to correct that. You decide to shoot a little sooner, or later, or higher, or with more lead. The picture appears, and this time you fire earlier. Now the shot feels rushed, and the target sails on again, this time with the sense that you were too far in front.

Back and forth it goes. Late. Then early. Then late again. The more you try to control the timing, the more inconsistent it becomes. This happens because timing is not something the conscious mind can manage in real time. The conscious mind is too slow to react to a moving target with only a short

window of time to break the target.

The conscious mind works in steps. It observes, evaluates, decides, and then acts. That process takes time - far more time than a moving target allows. Even when it feels quick, it is still too slow for something that must remain fluid from beginning to end. Your subconscious, on the other hand, works differently. It does not wait to decide. It responds.

When your eyes are clearly connected to the target, and your movement is flowing with it, your subconscious is constantly adjusting. It is reading the speed, the line, the distance, and the relationship between the gun and the target in a continuous way. It does not need to stop and confirm. It does not need to measure. It recognizes patterns and responds instantly. And within that continuous response, there is a moment when everything aligns. You do not create that moment. You do not choose it. You recognize it - without thinking - and the shot happens.

That is why your best shots never feel like decisions. They feel like responses.

Think back to the shot you remember from Chapter 1. You did not decide when to pull the trigger. You did not say to yourself, "Now is the correct moment." The shot simply happened. And afterward, it felt right. That feeling did not come from control. It came from allowing the timing to emerge naturally. A useful way to understand this is to return to something familiar.

Imagine again riding a bicycle. When you turn, you do not decide the exact moment to lean, or the precise angle required to stay balanced. You do not calculate how much pressure to apply to the handlebars or when to adjust your body. If you tried to do that consciously, the ride would become unstable almost immediately.

Instead, you look where you want to go, and your body responds. The timing of every adjustment - the lean, the balance, the correction - happens automatically. Shooting works the same way. When you are connected to the target, the timing of the shot is part of that continuous adjustment. It is not a separate decision layered on top of the movement.

It is embedded within it.

The problem begins the moment you try to take control of that timing. As soon as you begin to look for the “right moment,” you step out of the flow of the shot and into a position of evaluation. You start comparing what you see to what you expect. You begin to confirm instead of respond. That creates hesitation. Even if it is only a fraction of a second, it is enough. The movement slows. The connection weakens. And the shot, instead of happening naturally, becomes something you are trying to trigger at the correct time.

This is why so many shots feel either rushed or late when you miss. They are not actually early or late in the way most shooters think. They are disconnected. When the connection is strong, timing takes care of itself. When the connection is weak, timing becomes something you chase.

A better approach is to stop trying to find the moment and instead focus on staying connected long enough for the moment to appear. That means starting with a plan:

- Seeing the target clearly and keeping your eyes on the target
- Beginning the movement without hesitation smooth and fluid.
- Allowing the gun to move with the target.
- And then staying with that movement without interruption.

If you do that, something interesting begins to happen. The urge to decide when to shoot starts to fade. You no longer feel like you need to “pick the moment.” Instead, the shot happens from within the movement. And when it does, it feels different. It feels clean. It feels natural. It feels the way your best shots have always felt.

It might even feel weird. How did that happen when I did not control the movements and pick the place to take the shot. Now the trick is to repeat that again. As you practice this technique you will see targets break that surprise you that the gun was where it needed to be. You will also wonder

how a target was missed that you thought would be crushed.

There will still be times when a target does not break. That is part of shooting. There will also be times when the target breaks and you thought you were actually behind or above. But your subconscious knew where the gun needed to be.

When you stay connected and allow the timing to happen instead of trying to control it, those misses become easier to understand. They are no longer confusing. They are simply moments where the connection was not quite what it needed to be. And that is something you can return to.

Timing is not something you improve by trying harder. It is something that improves when you stop interfering with it. The simplest way to think about it is this:

- You do not create the moment.
- You allow it.

Think again about bunker shooting. If you want to excel, you have to master trusting your eyes and allowing your subconscious to take the shot for you. The clay is simply going too fast to react any other way.

CHAPTER 6

Lead Without Confusion

If there is one subject in shooting that has created more confusion, more debate, and more unnecessary thinking than almost anything else, it is the idea of lead. It is discussed constantly, often described in measurements - feet, inches, gaps - and presented as something that must be learned, memorized, and repeated with precision.

At first, that seems logical. Many of us were taught to see the target and move along the flight path to in front of the target and pull the trigger. If we did it right, the target broke. I found this difficult to accomplish. There are just too many variables to consider. Speed, angle, direction, rising target, or dropping.

The target is moving, so you must be in front of it. If you point at the target or are behind, you will miss. If you are in front at the right place, you will break it. So, the natural question becomes, how far in front do I need to be? That question leads to answers that sound precise.

- Two feet
- Three feet
- A barrel length
- A certain picture

And the more those ideas are repeated, the more it begins to feel like lead is something you must consciously create and control. But when you step into the station and try to apply that thinking, something begins to feel off. You call for the target. You see it. You begin to move. And then, somewhere in that movement, your attention shifts.

Instead of staying fully connected to the target, part of your focus moves to the gun. You begin to check where the barrel is. You try to compare it to the target. You attempt to judge the distance between them and create the “right” picture. You are no longer just seeing and moving. You are

measuring.

That is the moment the shot begins to break down. The movement slows. The connection weakens. The shot starts to feel like something you are trying to assemble instead of something that is unfolding naturally. And by the time you decide that the picture looks right - by the time you confirm that you have the correct lead - the moment you were trying to capture is already gone. The target continues on. And you are left with the feeling that you were "close," but not quite there.

This is where the confusion around lead becomes clear. Lead is not something you create first so that you can take the shot. It is something that appears when the shot is allowed to develop correctly. There is a place in shooting where this becomes impossible to ignore.

Remember Olympic bunker shooting?

In bunker, the targets are fast - very fast. They leave the trap house at speeds that give you very little time to react. There is no opportunity to study the target, no time to check the gun, and certainly no time to measure lead in any conscious way. If you tried to do that, you would not break anything. You would still be thinking while the target was already gone. And yet, experienced shooters break those targets consistently.

The first time you experience this kind of shooting successfully, it feels strange. You call for the target. It appears quickly, sometimes at an angle you did not expect. You move the gun toward it. And before you have time to think, the shot happens. The target breaks.

And what makes it even more interesting is what you feel afterward. There are times when you are convinced you were too far in front. Other times you feel like you must have been behind. The picture does not match what you think it should have been. And yet, the target broke cleanly. That feeling is important. It tells you something.

It tells you that the shot did not come from conscious control. It came from your subconscious responding to what it saw. The gun went where it needed to go. The shot hap-

pened when it needed to happen. And your conscious mind was not involved in measuring or deciding.

That is why it feels strange at first. Because you are used to believing that you should be in control of that part of the shot. But when you let go - when you stop trying to help - you begin to see that the shot works better without that interference. This is not limited to fast targets. It applies to every target. The difference is that slower targets give you time. And that time can work against you.

When you have more time, you feel like you should use it. You begin to check the gun. You begin to measure the lead. You begin to confirm the picture. And in doing so, you interrupt the process that would have worked if you had simply stayed connected. It becomes a subtle trap, and the trap setter knows that. The target is easier, but the time to think makes it harder.

A simple comparison helps bring this into focus. When you ride a bicycle, you do not measure how far to lean into a turn. You do not calculate angles or distances. You look where you want to go, and your body makes the adjustment. The lean appears as part of the movement.

If you tried to control it consciously - if you tried to decide exactly how much to lean and when - the ride would become unstable almost immediately. Lead works the same way. It is not something you calculate and then hold. It is something that develops within the movement when you stay connected to the target.

When your eyes are fully on the target and your movement is flowing with it, your subconscious is constantly adjusting the relationship between the gun and the target. It is not working in fixed distances. It is responding to speed, angle, and timing in a continuous way. And when everything aligns, the shot happens. You do not need to measure it. You do not need to confirm it. You only need to allow it to happen.

This does not mean that understanding lead has no value. It has a place. It can help you understand why certain shots work and others do not. It can give you a general sense of what is happening. But that understanding belongs outside

the shot, not inside it. The moment you bring measurement into the shot itself; you replace something fluid with something mechanical. And the shot was never meant to be mechanical.

When you begin to trust this, something changes. You stop looking for the correct picture. You stop trying to create the right amount of lead. You stay with the target. You move with it. And you allow the shot to happen within that movement. The more you do this, the more you rely on and trust it.

At first, it may feel uncomfortable. You may feel like you are giving up control. You may feel like you are not doing enough. But if you stay with it, you will begin to experience something familiar. Shots that feel like the ones you remember. Shots where the target looks clear. Shots where the movement feels connected. Shots where the gun seems to go where it needs to go without being forced.

And when those shots begin to appear more often, you will understand something important. Lead was never something you had to create. It was something you had to stop interfering with.

CHAPTER 7

Practicing the Right Way

At some point, every shooter begins to ask the same question. How do I practice this?

That is a reasonable question, because understanding an idea is one thing, and being able to repeat it under pressure is something else entirely. You can read about seeing the target, moving naturally, trusting your subconscious, and allowing the shot to happen, and it can all make perfect sense. To be consistent in breaking clays, this needs to be your default shooting style.

But when you step onto the course, the old habits have a way of returning. You begin to think again. You begin to check the gun. You begin to measure. And before long, the feeling you understood so clearly is gone. So, the question becomes not just what to do, but how to build it so it stays with you; your new default way of shooting.

I enjoy classical music. I am not talking about classics but the 300-year-old stuff by composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and Grieg. Many of my friends do not like classical music but I don't disparage them. For those of you that don't like classical music, disparage means to put down. Sorry, a poor rewrite of one of Bob Newhart's jokes.

I once watched a concert of Grieg's Piano Concerto which is full orchestra and a central pianist. The piece begins with a long drum roll on kettle drums followed by a strong beginning on the piano. The piece is about 30 minutes long and the pianist played with no music and with her eyes closed during most of the piece. She definitely played from memory, but she was not thinking of which key to play next and when. Her subconscious took over because she played so much practicing for the concert, she didn't have to think about which key was next or to play fast or slow. And that is the way we need to learn to shoot clay targets. In a way that allows us to shoot a tournament as we practiced without having to think through the shot.

Most shooters approach practice in a way that seems logical but works against them. They go to the range with the goal of hitting more targets. They keep score. They measure progress by the number of breaks. And while that may seem like the right way to improve, it creates a subtle problem. It shifts attention to the result and away from how to get the result. The result is the last thing that happens in a shot. But it is not what creates the shot consistently.

You can make a disconnected move, check the gun, measure the lead, and still break the target. It happens all the time. The target breaks, and you walk away thinking you did something right, when in reality, you reinforced a process that will not hold up consistently.

At the same time, you can make a clean, connected move - see the target clearly, move with it naturally, allow the shot to happen - and miss. Maybe the connection was just slightly off. Maybe the timing was not quite there. But the process was correct.

If you judge only by the result, you will reward the wrong process and question the right one.

This is where practice must change. Instead of asking, "Did I hit it?" you begin asking a different question. "Did it feel connected?" Did the gun find the target? Did I allow my subconscious to take the shot? Was the break a surprise?

I have hit plenty of targets that I thought I should have missed and missed targets that I thought would be sure hits. Now your attention shifts to the process instead of the outcome. You begin to notice how the shot develops. You begin to feel the difference between a shot that was allowed to happen and one that was forced. And over time, that awareness becomes more valuable than the score itself. This does not mean that breaking targets no longer matters. It does. But it is no longer the primary measure of progress. The primary measure becomes the quality of the shot. In other words, riding the bicycle while not thinking about balance or playing an instrument without thinking about which note is next. You can enjoy the experience when you are not focused on making sure you balance correctly or that you don't miss

the next keys.

Imagine two shooters on the same station. One breaks eight out of ten targets, but every shot feels controlled. He is checking the gun, measuring the lead, and managing the timing. The breaks are not clean, and the misses feel confusing. The other shooter breaks six out of ten, but every shot is connected. He is seeing the target clearly, moving naturally, and allowing the shot to happen. The breaks are solid, and even the misses make sense. Which shooter is improving? Which shooter will get better with practice?

It is the second one. Because he is building something that will become consistent. The first shooter is building a process that depends on control, and that control will fail under pressure.

This is where many shooters become impatient. They want immediate results. They want to see the score improve right away. But building a reliable process takes time. It requires trust. And it requires the willingness to let go of short-term results in order to gain long-term consistency.

A simple way to approach practice is to give yourself a clear intention before each shot. Not a technical checklist. Not a list of things to fix. Just one direction.

See the target clearly. Move with the target. Stay connected. Let your subconscious take the shot.

Then call for the target and allow the shot to develop. After the shot, instead of reacting to the result, return to the question: Did it feel connected? If the answer is yes, you have done what you came to practice. If the answer is no, you simply reset and try again.

There is no need to analyze every miss or correct every detail. You are not trying to solve each missed shot. You are trying to build a way of shooting. You want this new way of shooting to be your default way of shooting.

Over time, something begins to change. The connection becomes more familiar. The movement becomes more natural. The urge to interfere begins to fade. And the shots that once felt occasional begin to show up more often.

There is another important part of practice that is often

overlooked. You do not need to shoot a full round to improve. In fact, shorter, more focused practice is often more effective.

Take a single presentation. Watch it. Understand it. Make a plan. And then shoot it multiple times with the same intention. Not to break every target, but to build the feeling of connection and allowing your subconscious to work for you. This removes another source of pressure. You are not moving from station to station, carrying the result of the previous shot with you. You are staying in one place, working on one thing, and allowing yourself to repeat it.

When that begins to feel consistent, move on. Not because you mastered it, but because you understand it. This approach to practice builds something different. It builds trust. And trust is everything. When you begin to trust that your subconscious can shoot better than you can, you use it more and more. The more you use it, the more it becomes your default technique which means you can fall back to this technique when you drift away.

That trust is what allows everything else in this book to work. Without it, you will always return to control. You will always try to help. You will always step back into the process at the moment when you should be letting it happen.

With it, something changes. You begin to recognize the feeling of a good shot before the result. You begin to trust what you see. You begin to allow the shot to happen more often. And when that begins to carry into competition, you will understand something important. You did not improve because you tried harder or memorized the path of the target. You improved because you learned how to get out of your own way.

When I shoot bunker and I begin to miss too many, I know to stop and reset. I am trying to help improve my shooting and score. Forget the score and focus on your technique and your scores will take care of themselves.

CHAPTER 8

Long Targets

There is something about a long target that gives a shooter confidence before the shot ever begins. It stays in the air longer, it appears to move more slowly, and it seems to offer more time to do everything correctly. Standing in the station, watching it float across the sky, it is easy to believe that this is the kind of target that should be handled without difficulty. If you are a rifle shooter, it means time to make the perfect shot.

You might even say to yourself, almost without thinking, "I've got plenty of time on this one." That thought feels harmless, but it changes more than most shooters realize.

At first, everything still begins the way it should. You call for the target, your eyes go to it, and your body begins to respond. For a brief moment, the connection is there. The movement starts naturally, just as it does on every good shot you have ever made. If the shot were to happen at that point, it would likely feel simple and complete.

But because the target is still there - because it has not yet forced a decision - you begin to use the extra time. You follow it a little longer and wait until it gets closer. You begin to check where the gun is in relation to the target. You look for a clearer picture, something more certain, something that feels exactly right before you allow the shot to happen. And in doing that, you step into the process.

The movement that began as a natural response begins to slow, almost without you noticing it. The connection that was clear at the start becomes less certain. Instead of moving with the target, you begin managing the relationship between the gun and the bird, trying to confirm that everything is correct before committing to the shot.

By the time you finally decide to pull the trigger, the shot no longer feels the way it did at the beginning. It feels controlled. It feels slightly delayed. And when the target doesn't break, it leaves you with a confusing sense that you

had more than enough time, and yet somehow it still didn't work.

That confusion comes from a simple misunderstanding. The problem was never the amount of time. The problem was how that time was used.

Fast targets force you into the correct process whether you intend it or not. They don't give you time to analyze or confirm. You see them, you move, and the shot happens within that movement. There is no opportunity to interfere, so the connection between your eyes, your body, and the target tends to stay intact.

Long targets remove that pressure. They give you time to think. And if you are not careful, that is exactly what you begin to do. You think about the gun. You think about the lead. You think about the moment you should shoot. Each of those thoughts feels small and reasonable, but together they change the nature of the shot. What began as a response becomes a decision-making process, and that process is always just slow enough to get in the way.

This is why a long target that appears easy can suddenly feel difficult, and why the experience on those targets often seems inconsistent. You may miss the first one in a way that feels almost unexplainable, only to break the next few cleanly without making any conscious adjustment at all.

Nothing about the target changed. What changed was how much you interfered. On the missed shot, you used the time. You tried to be precise, to confirm, to make sure everything was correct. On the shots that broke, you simply allowed the movement to happen. You saw the target, moved with it, and let the shot occur without waiting for something better.

The difference is not in skill. It is in timing and trust. A useful way to think about this is to return to the idea of the plan. Before you ever call for the target, you have time to decide where you want to break it. That is where your thinking belongs. You watch the presentation, understand it, and choose your break point. Once that decision is made, the work is done.

When the target is in the air, there is nothing left to figure out. The process should be the same as it is on any other target. Your eyes go to the bird, your body begins to move, and the gun comes with it. The shot happens within that movement, not after it, and not as the result of a separate decision.

What often happens on long targets is that shooters delay that moment. They wait for the target to get to a certain place. They wait for the picture to look perfect. They wait until they feel completely sure. But that waiting is what breaks the shot.

The best moment is rarely the one you wait for the longest. It is usually the one that appears early, within the natural flow of the movement, before you begin to question it. It is the moment when everything is still connected, when the shot is still part of the response rather than something you are trying to control.

When you begin to trust that moment - when you allow the shot to happen as part of the movement instead of delaying it - you start to see long targets differently. They no longer feel like something that requires extra care or extra control. They feel like any other target, governed by the same principles that make every good shot work.

You see the target clearly. You move with it. You stay connected. And you allow the shot to happen. The extra time is still there, but it no longer works against you because you are not trying to use it to improve the shot. You are simply letting the shot develop the way it is meant to develop. In the end, the target did not change. The presentation did not change. The only thing that changed was your willingness to step in and try to make it better than it already was. And once you stop doing that, the long target becomes what it was all along.

Simple.

CHAPTER 9

Fast Targets

The first time you stand in front of a truly fast target, it has a way of getting your attention immediately. It does not float into view the way a long target does, and it does not give you time to study it. It appears suddenly, moving with a kind of urgency that makes everything feel compressed. Before you have fully settled into the station, it is already on its way.

Your first instinct is almost always the same. You feel like you need to hurry. That feeling is natural, but it is also misleading. Fast targets do not require you to rush. They require you to begin correctly.

I once shot a station where the shooting house faced a narrow opening between tree lines on either side. Much like an old logging or fire road in the forest. I could see the clay in the trees on my left flying through the trees then across the opening and into the trees on the right. That meant my shot had to be made between the tree lines which allowed less than 1 second to make the shot. There was no way to make this shot consciously. I had to rely on my subconscious to be ready when the target cleared the trees and make the shot before it disappeared into the other tree line. It is immaterial how many times I missed that target. But that was long before I learned to trust my subconscious. I look forward to trying it again now.

What most shooters experience on a fast target is not actually a problem of speed. It is a problem of hesitation. There is a very small delay - sometimes so small that it is barely noticeable - between the moment the target appears and the moment the movement begins. That delay creates the sensation that you are behind, and once you feel behind, everything that follows becomes an attempt to catch up. The shot becomes reactive in the wrong way. Instead of moving with the target, you are chasing it.

You have probably felt this before. You call for the target, it appears quickly, and for just an instant you hesitate.

Maybe your eyes take a fraction of a second longer to lock onto it. Maybe your body waits just long enough for you to recognize the line before committing to the move. Whatever the cause, the start is slightly delayed. From that point on, the shot never quite materializes. The best you can do is second best when taking the shot.

You move faster. You try to get the gun out in front. You rush the trigger. And the target continues on, often untouched, leaving you with the feeling that it was simply too fast. But the target was not too fast. The start was too late. This becomes clear when you compare it to a shot that works.

You call for the same target. It appears just as quickly. But this time, your eyes go to it immediately, and your body begins to move without hesitation. There is no pause, no need to confirm what you are seeing and certainly no time to think. The movement starts at the same moment the target is recognized. And suddenly, the target does not feel as fast. The speed has not changed. Your relationship to it has.

When the movement begins immediately, you are no longer chasing the target. You are moving with it from the very beginning. The gun does not need to catch up because it never fell behind. The shot develops within that movement, and the timing becomes something that happens naturally rather than something you are trying to force.

This is why experienced shooters often describe fast targets as easier than they first appear. Not because they are slower, but because they leave less room for interference. Fast targets remove time. And in doing so, they remove opportunity. They do not give you time to check the gun. They do not give you time to measure lead. They do not give you time to decide when to shoot.

And because they do not give you time to do those things, they quietly guide you into the correct process. You see the target. You move. You shoot. There is something valuable in that simplicity. It shows you what the shot looks like when it is allowed to happen without interruption.

The challenge, of course, is that not every fast target will

feel comfortable at first. The urgency of the presentation can make you feel as though you need to do more, when in reality you need to do less. The instinct to rush often leads to forcing the gun, trying to get ahead too quickly, or firing before the movement has fully developed. That kind of rushing is different from starting early. Starting early is simply responding without hesitation. Rushing is trying to make up for a delayed start. They may feel similar, but they produce very different results.

When you start correctly, the movement feels smooth, even on a fast target. There is no sense of panic or urgency. The shot unfolds naturally, and the target breaks in a way that feels almost surprising because of how little effort it seemed to require.

When you rush, everything feels tight. The movement is forced. The timing feels uncertain. Even if the target breaks, it does not feel like something you can trust or repeat. The key, then, is not to move faster, but to remove hesitation. That begins with the eyes.

If your eyes go to the target immediately - without searching, without delay - you give your body a clear starting point. From there, the movement can begin naturally. There is no need to wait, and no need to hurry. You are simply responding.

This is where the connection to earlier chapters becomes clear. Seeing the target well allows the movement to begin cleanly. Allowing the movement to stay connected prevents you from falling behind. Trusting the timing keeps you from rushing the shot. All of it works together.

When you begin to trust this process, something interesting happens. Fast targets begin to feel simpler than slower ones. Not because they are easier in the traditional sense, but because they leave less room for you to interfere. They guide you toward the kind of shooting you are trying to build - clear, connected, and responsive. And that builds confidence.

In that way, fast targets can become some of your best teachers. They show you what happens when you stop trying

to control the shot and allow it to happen instead. They show you that

speed is not the problem. Hesitation is. And once that becomes clear, the solution is no longer complicated.

See the target. Move immediately. Stay connected. Trust and let the shot happen. The target will take care of the rest.

CHAPTER 10

Doubles

There is a moment, just before a pair is called, when the nature of the shot changes. It is not something you can see from the outside, but you can feel it if you pay attention. The targets have not yet appeared, and yet your focus is already divided. You know there are two targets coming, and that knowledge alone begins to influence how you approach the shot.

You are no longer dealing with a single, complete moment. You are anticipating what comes next. This is where most of the difficulty with doubles begins. Not in the targets themselves, but in the way, attention is managed before the first shot is ever taken.

You step into the station and watch the presentation. The first target comes out, followed by the second. You study the line of each, decide where you want to break them, and form a plan. That part is no different from any other target. But once you know there are two, something subtle changes. You begin to think ahead.

Even if you are not aware of it, part of your attention moves to the second bird before the first one is finished. It may only be a small shift, just enough to remind yourself where the second target will be, but it is enough. Because now, instead of giving your full attention to the first target, you are dividing it. That division is what breaks the shot. The first target requires the same thing every other target requires. You must see it clearly. You must move with it. You must stay connected long enough for the shot to happen.

But when part of your attention is already preparing for the second target, the connection to the first begins to weaken. The movement becomes less certain. The timing feels slightly off. And even if the target breaks, it often does not feel like a clean, complete shot. Then the transition to the second target begins from that weakened position.

Now you are in recovery mode trying to still make the shot

successful. You feel like you need to move faster. You rush the gun to the second target. The shot becomes hurried. And the pair that looked simple suddenly feels difficult.

This is why doubles often feel inconsistent. Not because the targets are more complex, but because the shooter is trying to manage two shots at once.

A useful way to understand this is to think about something much simpler. Imagine you are having a conversation with someone, and while they are speaking, you are already thinking about what you want to say next. You are not fully listening. You are dividing your attention between what is happening now and what is coming next and you can't wait for them to stop talking. As a result, you miss part of what they said. Your response is not quite right. The connection is lost. Doubles work the same way.

When you try to hold both targets in your mind at the same time, you lose the ability to fully engage with either one. The solution is not to think faster. It is to think less. Each target must exist on its own with a plan for each. Which target should I shoot first that will allow time to shoot the second? When the first target appears, it is the only target that matters. You see it. You move with it. You allow the shot to happen. And only when that shot is complete - when the first target has been fully finished - does your attention move to the second.

That transition, when done correctly, does not feel rushed. It feels natural. Because you are not forcing it. You are simply allowing your attention to shift from one completed shot to the next. This is something that experienced shooters often describe in simple terms, but it carries more meaning than it appears. They say, "Shoot the first bird first."

That is not just advice. It is a description of how attention must work. The first target is not the beginning of a pair. It is a complete shot. When you treat it that way, something changes. The connection becomes stronger. The timing becomes clearer. And the transition to the second target becomes easier, because it is built on a solid foundation instead of a rushed one.

There will still be moments when the transition feels quick. Some pairs require that. But even then, the principle remains the same. You are not thinking about both targets at once. You are allowing one shot to finish before the next begins. This is where many shooters make the mistake of trying to speed everything up. They believe that because there are two targets, they need to move faster, react quicker, and compress the entire process.

But speed is not the issue. Connection is. If the first shot is connected, the second one has a chance to be. If the first shot is rushed or divided, the second one rarely recovers. When you begin to trust this, doubles start to feel different. They no longer feel like two problems happening at once. They feel like two simple shots, taken one after the other.

Create the plan. Which do I shoot first and when I pursue the first, where will the second be? You see the first. You move with it. You shoot. Then you see the second. You move with it. You shoot. There is no need to carry both targets in your mind at the same time. There is no need to rush ahead. There is no need to manage everything at once. You simply stay present. One shot at a time.

And when you do that, the pair begins to feel less like a challenge and more like a rhythm. Because in the end, doubles are not one fast problem. They are two complete shots taken one at a time.

CHAPTER 11

Losing It

There is a moment that every shooter recognizes, even if he cannot always explain it clearly. Things were working. The targets looked right. The movement felt natural. The shot was happening without effort. You were not thinking about much, and because of that, everything seemed to fall into place. You moved from station to station with a quiet sense of confidence - not forced confidence, but the kind that comes from knowing you are not interfering with the process. And then, without warning, it changes.

It might be one target. A miss that doesn't quite make sense. You pause for a moment and think about it. Was I behind? Did I rush that? Did I look at the gun? Was my mount off?

The next target comes out. And now, instead of simply seeing it and moving, you are aware of the previous miss. You are trying to correct something, even if you are not sure what it was. The shot feels slightly different. A little tighter. A little less certain. Maybe you break it. Maybe you don't. But either way, something has shifted.

Within a few shots, the feeling you had earlier is gone. The targets no longer look as clear. The movement no longer feels as connected. The shot becomes something you are trying to fix instead of something you are allowing to happen. This is what most shooters describe as losing it.

And it feels frustrating, because you know what it felt like just moments before. You know you were not doing anything special or different. You know the targets have not changed. You know your ability has not disappeared. And yet, you cannot seem to get back to that place.

The natural response is to try harder. You tighten up your focus because you probably were not focused on the target when you missed. You bring the gun back tighter to your shoulder because it probably was not held snug and moved. You check your stance and shift your weight. You pay closer

attention. You try to be more precise. And the more you do that, the worse the day gets. We have all been there. The pressure mounts because now, we are letting the team down and not missing is embarrassing.

This is where most shooters misunderstand what is happening and they don't know how to fix it. They believe they have lost something. They believe that whatever allowed them to shoot well earlier has somehow disappeared, and that they need to find a way to bring it back. But that is not what happened. You did not lose it. You interrupted it. Your attempts to shoot better forced you to interfere with the shot. You no longer trusted yourself to make the shot happen.

The feeling you had - the clarity, the connection, the ease - was not something that came from effort. It came from the absence of interference. You were seeing the target, moving naturally, and allowing the shot to happen. Your subconscious was doing the work, and you were not stepping in to control it. Then something small changed. A thought. A miss. A moment of awareness. And that was enough.

What happened? I missed an easy shot and everyone on the team is wondering how I could miss that shot. I can't let that happen again. I will fix that on the next shot. And so, you try harder and the targets stop breaking.

Once your attention shifted away from the process and toward fixing, correcting, or controlling, you stepped back into the shot. You began to manage something that had been working on its own. And from that moment on, the shot could no longer feel the same. This is why trying to fix it usually makes it worse. When you miss a target, the instinct is to analyze it. You want to understand what went wrong. You want to correct it. You want to make sure it doesn't happen again.

But in doing that, you bring your conscious mind back into the shot. You begin to think about lead. You begin to check the gun. You begin to decide when to shoot. And all of those things are exactly what you were not doing when everything was working.

This creates a cycle. You lose the feeling. You try to fix it. The fixing makes it worse. So, you try harder. And the harder you try, the more disconnected the shot becomes.

Breaking that cycle requires a different response. Instead of trying to fix the shot, you return to the process. The process is your default way of shooting. Not by thinking about it more, but by removing what you added. You do not need to find the feeling again. You need to stop interfering with it.

That begins with something simple. You step into the station. You take a breath. You let go of the last shot. And you return your attention to what matters. You see the target. You allow your eyes to connect with it. You begin the movement. And you let the shot happen. Not because you are sure it will work. But because you understand that trying to control it will not.

At first, this can feel uncomfortable. It can feel like you are ignoring a mistake. It can feel like you are not doing enough to correct it. But what you are actually doing is returning to the only thing that allows the shot to work. The connection. Trust your eyes and subconscious.

Over time, you begin to recognize something important. The feeling you thought you lost was never gone. It was only covered up. Covered up by thought. Covered up by control. Covered up by the need to fix.

And when those things are removed, the feeling returns. Not because you created it again, but because you stopped getting in its way. This does not mean you will never lose it. You will. Every shooter does. But the difference is that you will understand what is happening. You will recognize that nothing has been taken from you. That your ability is still there. That the process still works. And instead of chasing the feeling, you will return to the fundamentals that allow it to appear. See the target. Move with it. Stay connected. Let the shot happen. Trust the shot.

And when you do that, you will find that what once felt unpredictable becomes something you can return to, again and again. Not by trying harder. But by getting out of the

way.

CHAPTER 12

The Tune-Up

There comes a point in every shooter's experience where things feel just slightly off. Our minds can be clouded with other things or maybe we fell back to some bad habits and need a reminder.

The targets are still being hit, but not as cleanly. The movement is still there, but it doesn't feel as natural. The confidence is present, but it is quieter, less certain and we might be starting to help again, ever so slightly. It is the kind of feeling that makes you pause between stations and think, "Something isn't quite right."

This is where most shooters begin to go in the wrong direction. They start looking for something to fix. They think about their hold point. They adjust their stance. They try to be more precise with the gun. They begin to revisit everything they know, searching for the one detail that will bring everything back into place.

At first, this feels like the right approach. After all, if something is off, it must need to be corrected. But more often than not, this leads to something else. More thinking. More control. More interference. And instead of improving, the shot begins to feel even less natural.

This is where the idea of a tune-up becomes important. A tune-up is not a rebuild. It is not about taking everything apart and starting over. It is not about adding more information or more control. It is about returning to what already works.

In Bunker, very small changes make for missed targets. There is not time to think but only react. If the gun fit worked for you when you were hitting, what changed? Adding a different vest, or adding a sweatshirt? Same shoes? When I began shooting bunker, I found that the comfortable shoes I wore were a little too worn and the heels had rounded which was enough to keep me slightly off balance and having to compensate. I fixed that with more stable shoes. Likewise,

if your mount changed, change it back or adjust. Maybe shorten the stock, if adjustable. If there are no changes, get back to the basics and restart your training. That is return to simple.

The challenge is that simple often feels like not enough. When things are not working perfectly, the instinct is to add. To think more. To try harder. To control more of the process.

But everything in this book has been leading to the same idea. Your best shooting happens when you interfere the least. So, when things begin to drift, the question is not, "What do I need to add?" It is, "What have I started to add that doesn't belong?"

That question changes everything. Instead of searching for a new solution, you begin removing what is getting in the way. You step into the station. You create your plan. You take a breath. And you simplify your focus and begin with soft eyes. You are not thinking about lead. You are not thinking about timing. You are not thinking about the last miss. You are returning to your foundation, your default system of shooting.

You see the target. You move with it. You allow the shot to happen. You return to trusting your eyes and subconscious. That is the tune-up. It is not dramatic. It is not complicated. But it is effective. At first, it may feel like you are not doing enough. You may feel the urge to add something - just to play it safe. Just to make sure. My team is counting on me.

But that urge is exactly what you are trying to remove. Because the moment you add it back in, the shot begins to feel heavier again. A good tune-up does not introduce anything new. It restores what was already working and what you have already proven that you can do.

There is another part of this that is worth understanding. The feeling of something being "off" is not a problem. It is feedback. It is your awareness telling you that something has changed in your attention, your connection, or your trust in the process.

And that awareness is awesome. Because it reminds you of what you can and should be doing and gives you the op-

portunity to return. Instead of ignoring it or trying to force your way through it, you use it as a signal. A reminder.

Go back to simple. Trust your eyes and the shot. When you do that, something interesting begins to happen. The shot starts to feel lighter again. The movement becomes more natural. The targets begin to look clearer. Not because you fixed something but because you removed what was interfering. And there is a great feeling when the targets start breaking consistently again and you get that old feeling back. I still got it.

This is why the tune-up is something you will return to over and over again. Not just when things are going poorly. But anytime you feel even a slight drift away from the process. It is a way of staying grounded. A way of keeping the shot simple. A way of reminding yourself that you already know how to do this. It keeps your default system of shooting your foundation.

You have already experienced what it feels like when everything works. You have already seen how simple the shot can be. The tune-up is how you get back there and keep you there. Not by trying harder. But by doing less. And when your shooting is off, return to your foundation, your default system of shooting and start over, even in the middle of a tournament. You can always finish strong.

CHAPTER 13

Letting Go

There comes a point in every shooter's development where understanding is no longer the problem. You know what to do. You understand the importance of seeing the target clearly. You know the movement should begin without hesitation. You recognize that timing is not something you should be trying to control. You have experienced what it feels like when the shot happens naturally, without effort. And yet, even with all of that, there are still moments when the shot feels forced.

That is where the real challenge begins. Because at this point, improvement is no longer about learning something new. It is about letting go of something you have been holding onto.

Most shooters spend years building habits around control. They learn to check the gun. They learn to measure lead. They learn to confirm the moment of the shot. And those habits do not disappear just because they understand a better way. They remain. Quietly waiting. And they show up most often when something matters. A target feels important. A score begins to build. A competition is on the line. And without realizing it, the shooter begins to tighten. The attention shifts. Instead of simply seeing the target, there is a desire to make sure. To be certain.

To guarantee the result. It is subtle. Almost invisible. But it changes everything. The movement becomes slightly more controlled. The timing becomes something you try to manage. The shot becomes something you try to ensure. And in doing so, you move away from the very thing that allows the shot to work.

Letting go is not about doing nothing. It is about releasing the need to control what is already working. That can feel uncomfortable at first. Because control feels safe. Control feels responsible. Control feels like you are doing everything you can to make the shot succeed. But in shooting,

control often has the opposite effect. It slows the movement. It interrupts timing. It breaks connection. And the more important the shot feels, the stronger the urge to control becomes.

Remember the pianist? What would happen if she thought about which key to press next? She wouldn't be sitting in front of a world class orchestra very long. To play the piece correctly, she had to allow her subconscious to work for her.

This is where letting go becomes a conscious decision. Not a passive one. A deliberate one. You step into the station. You feel the pressure. You recognize the urge to control the shot. And instead of following it, you choose something different, you return your attention to the target. You allow your eyes to stay there. You begin the movement without hesitation. And then, most importantly, you allow the shot to happen without trying to manage it. When you crush the target you realize, you still have it. And that makes you want to repeat it again exactly the same way because it is a great feeling when it works.

That is what letting go looks like. It is not careless. It is not relaxed in the sense of being unfocused. It is focused in the right place, without interference. You are fully engaged. But you are not controlling. There is a difference.

A useful way to understand this is to think about catching something that is thrown to you. If someone tosses you a ball, you do not calculate where your hand should be, how fast it should move, or exactly when to close your fingers. You look at the ball, and your body responds. The movement is automatic.

But if you try to control that process - if you start thinking about your hand, your timing, your position - you are far more likely to miss something that should have been easy.

Shooting is no different. When you see the target and allow your body to respond, everything works. When you try to control that response, everything becomes harder. Letting go is simply trusting that response.

It is trusting that your eyes, your body, and your subconscious can do what they are already capable of doing. This

does not mean every shot will be perfect. It does not mean you will never miss. But it does mean that your consistency will get better and better and your old scores will be a thing of the past. And that is the objective. Trusting your eyes and letting your subconscious take the shot is the tool. Trust the shot.

And over time, your shots will be better, and your scores will get better. Not because you are controlling them better. But because you are allowing them more often.

There is something else that begins to happen when you truly let go. The pressure begins to change. It does not disappear. But it no longer feels like something you have to fight. Because you are no longer trying to force the outcome. You are simply allowing the process. That shift is subtle, but it is powerful. You step into the station. You feel what is at stake. And instead of tightening, instead of trying to make sure, you return to what you know works. You see the target. You move with it. You let the shot happen. And in that moment, you are no longer trying to control the result. You are trusting the process.

That is what letting go really means. It is not giving up. It is not stepping back. It is stepping out of the way. And when you do that, you begin to experience something familiar. The same feeling you had in the shots you remember. The same clarity. The same connection. The same sense that the shot is happening without effort. Because nothing new was added. Something was simply removed.

Many years ago, I took a course in public speaking from the Dale Carnegie Institute. One of the main points that I remember from the course was that when we make a speech or presentation, we all have butterflies in our stomachs. The objective is not to get rid of the butterflies, but to get them flying in formation. The stress when controlled, can keep us on our toes.

CHAPTER 14

Pressure

There is a point in every round where the targets begin to feel different, even though nothing about them has actually changed. The presentation is the same, the distance is the same, and the movement of the target has not become any more difficult. And yet, standing in the station, the shot carries more weight than it did just a few moments before.

You might not notice exactly when it begins. It could be after a long run of good shots, when you suddenly realize you haven't missed in a while. It could be near the end of a round, when the score starts to matter more than it did at the beginning. It could be in a competition, when you are aware of where you stand or what is at stake. Or it could be the expensive shotgun that should prove that you are a good shooter worthy of an expensive shotgun. Or you are the senior member of the team with the most experience and everyone is looking for you to be the ringer.

However it appears, the feeling is familiar to most of us. The shot begins to matter more than it should.

What makes pressure difficult is not the situation itself, but the way it changes your attention. The moment a shot feels important, your focus begins to shift away from the process and toward the result. Instead of simply seeing the target and moving with it, you become aware of what the shot means. You begin to think about what will happen if you hit it, and what will happen if you don't.

That shift is small, but it is enough. Because now, instead of being fully engaged in the shot, part of your attention is somewhere else. You may still call for the target. You may still move the gun. From the outside, everything can look the same. But from the inside, something has changed.

You begin to feel the need to make the shot happen. You can't take a chance on missing, so you have to make sure everything you need to do is perfect. That feeling often shows up as control. You try to be more careful. You try to be more

precise. You try to make sure you don't make a mistake. The intention is good. But the effect is not. The movement becomes tighter. The timing becomes something you try to manage. The connection to the target becomes less direct. And in trying to guarantee the result, you move away from the very process that allows the shot to work.

This is why pressure can feel so frustrating. It does not introduce a new problem. It simply exposes how quickly you can step away from what you already know how to do. A useful way to understand this is to think about something simple, like walking across a room. Under normal circumstances, you do not think about each step. You move naturally, without awareness of the mechanics involved.

If someone were to place a narrow board on the ground and ask you to walk across it without stepping off, your attention would change. The act of walking has not changed. But now it matters. You become aware of your balance. You begin to control each step. You try to make sure you do it correctly. And because of that, something that was automatic begins to feel less natural. Now put that same board 20 feet in the air and try to walk it. Our attention is more about falling than just walking the board.

Shooting under pressure works the same way. The process does not change. But your awareness of it does. Instead of allowing the shot to happen, you begin trying to ensure that it does. The solution is not to remove pressure. That is not possible. The solution is to keep your attention where it belongs, even when pressure is present.

That means returning to the same foundation you rely on in every other shot. You step into the station. You recognize that the shot feels important. And instead of trying to control it, you bring your attention back to the target. Not the score. Not the outcome. The target. You allow your eyes to connect with it. You begin the movement without hesitation. And you stay with that movement, allowing the shot to happen within it.

The pressure does not disappear. But it no longer controls the shot. Over time, you begin to understand something im-

portant. Pressure is not something you overcome by force. It is something you manage by attention. Where your attention goes determines how the shot unfolds. If it goes to the result, the shot becomes controlled. If it stays on the target, the shot remains natural. That is the difference.

That is why practicing trusting your eyes and letting your subconscious take the shot is so important. That is your default way of shooting and where you need to be the most comfortable.

Remember the bicycle illustration? The goal is to enjoy the ride.

You recognize what happened. You recognize where your attention went. And you know how to bring it back. That is what allows consistency to develop, even when the situation becomes more demanding. Because in the end, pressure does not change the shot. It only changes where you look. And when you learn to keep your attention on the target, no matter what is happening around you, the shot remains what it has always been.

Simple and doable, again.

Returning to Simple

By the time you reach this point, there is very little in this book that should feel unfamiliar. You have seen the ideas from different angles. You have recognized the experiences described, not because they are new, but because you have lived them yourself. You have felt the difference between a shot that is controlled and a shot that is allowed. You have seen how easily the process can be interrupted, and how quickly it returns when you step out of the way.

And if there is one thing that becomes clear, it is this:

- Nothing here was ever complicated.
- The difficulty was never in the shot itself.
- The difficulty was in what we added to it.

From the beginning, shooting has always been simple.

- A target appears.
- You see it.
- You move with it.
- You allow the shot to happen. You trust the shot.

That is all it has ever been and all it will ever be. But somewhere along the way, it begins to feel like more. You begin to think about lead. You begin to think about timing. You begin to think about where the gun is, what the score is, what the result will be. You can't understand how to shoot a particular target or pair.

And slowly, without realizing it, something that was simple becomes something that feels complicated. This is not because the shot changed. It is because your attention changed.

Throughout this book, the same pattern has appeared again and again. When you stay connected to the target, the shot works. When you shift your attention away from it -

toward the gun, the lead, the timing, or the result - the shot becomes something you try to manage. That is the line.

And it is a line you will cross many times. There will be days when everything feels easy, when the targets look clear and the shot happens without effort. And there will be days when nothing feels quite right, when the movement feels disconnected and the result is inconsistent.

That is part of the experience and why we keep coming back trying to do better. If it was easy and anyone can do it, we would probably not enjoy shooting clays. The goal is not to eliminate those changes. The goal is to understand them.

When things are working, you do not need to analyze them. You do not need to hold onto them. You simply continue. When things are not working, you do not need to rebuild everything. You

do not need to search for something new. You return. You return to the target. You return to the movement. You return to the process. You remove what does not belong. And when you do that, something familiar begins to appear again. The target looks clearer. The movement feels smoother. The shot happens without the same effort. Not because you found something new. But because you stopped getting in the way of what was already there.

This is why the idea of "returning to simple" matters. It is not a one-time realization. It is something you will come back to again and again. After a miss. After a good round. After a long break from shooting. After a moment when things begin to feel just slightly off. Each time, the answer is the same. Not more but less.

It means less control, less interference, less need to make the shot happen and more trust in the process that already works. Over time, this begins to change the way you see your own shooting. You stop chasing perfect rounds. You stop trying to force consistency. You begin to recognize that your best shooting is not something you create. It is something you allow.

And that realization brings a different kind of confidence. Not the confidence that comes from believing you can con-

trol every shot. But the confidence that comes from knowing you can return to what works. No matter what just happened. No matter what is at stake. You can always come back to this:

- See the target.
- Move with it.
- Let the shot happen. Trust the shot.

It will not always feel perfect. It will not always produce the result you want. But it will always give you the best chance to shoot the way you know you can. And that is enough.

This is why you will want to keep this book for future reference. We all need to come back to the basics from time to time. Not because we forgot them. But because we drifted away from them. And when we return, we find that they were never gone. They were simply waiting for us to get out of the way.

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