

Shooting Tip: Yoda Was Right! Yoda Was Right! Yoda Was Right!

By Duane Thomas

Many shooters hurt themselves with negative self-talk. At the same time, by failing to engage in positive self-talk, they miss opportunities to attain and reinforce superior performance. (Before I really get started here, I should mention that many of the ideas put forth in this article came from Greg Hamilton, head man at InSights Training Center. Just wanted to give credit where it's due.)

I see negative self-talk at matches on a regular basis. Every time we're given a shooting problem even slightly advanced, there's always that guy saying, "I'm going to suck at this," "I don't know how to do this," "This is too hard," or even, on one memorable occasion, "This is impossible." *Impossible*? That last one occurred at an IDPA match when we were faced with what was, actually, a very basic shooting problem: three targets, a steel Pepper Popper in the center, to the left a drop turner (i.e. a target that begins facing away from the shooter, is activated by hitting the Pepper Popper, briefly faces the shooter, then turns away again) and a static, unmoving paper target to the right. The slow way to run this drill is to hit the activator, transition over to the drop turner, shoot it, then engage the static. The fast way is to hit the activator, then use the time interval after hitting the steel – but before the moving target turns – to engage the static target first, before the turner. This takes decent shot-to-shot speed, and especially the ability to swiftly transition the gun between targets, but it's simply not that tough a nut to crack.

So we have "Mr. This is Impossible" going, "I don't see how they could ever expect us to shoot that target before the moving target disappears." I told him, "It's not impossible. Actually, it's not even particularly difficult." He absolutely didn't believe me. I said, "Okay, I'll show you it's not impossible." So I ran the stage in very slightly over three seconds, with no points down on either target. Then Bruce Bennett stepped up to the line.

At the time of this match, Bruce had moderately advanced Parkinson's and the seriously shaky hands that came with it [see *Bruce's story on Page 60*]. Since then, I'm happy to report, he's become a bionic man with multiple electronic brain implants that have reversed the symptoms of his disease, and he has his old B-class IPSC shooter skill level back. At the time, however, it was only pure guts and an absolutely awe-inspiring love of shooting and unwillingness to whine that kept him out there at matches.

So Bruce did it, too. Okay, his gun malfed on the very last shot, but he hit the Pepper Popper, engaged the static twice, transitioned over to the drop turner, shot it once, and had plenty of time left over for a second shot when his gun malfed. At which point I turned to "Mr. Impossible" and said, "If the guy with Parkinson's can do it...no one else has any excuse."

We see this sort of behavior at matches all the time. A stage with long-range shots: "I can't do it." A stage with one-hand-only shooting: "I suck at this." Why do that to yourself? Your subconscious mind is listening. If you tell it you're a bad shooter, it will believe you. Why not tell yourself you're a great shooter instead? Smile before shooting. Consciously smile. The moment you smile, you relax. The moment you relax, you shoot better.

So many times, when we do something wrong in practice, or at a match if we're a competitor, the immediate instinct is to beat ourselves up. "Well, THAT sucked." Because if we beat ourselves up first, no one else will do it, right? Often we notice the bad, but don't give ourselves credit for what we did right. Let's say the mission description is to draw from the holster and double tap three targets. The draw goes great, our shot-to-shot speed is great, we have five nice center hits...and we pull one shot just outside the target center. "Well,

THAT sucked." Why not instead tell ourselves, "That went great! The draw was fast, the speed was there, would you just LOOK at all those great hits." Let the one shot that wasn't quite there go; it never happened.

Negative self-talk is deadly, but self-talk works the other way, too. Positive self-talk is a powerful tool for self-improvement, and to build self-confidence.

When you've done something right, pat yourself on the back. I

mean, literally, reach around and physically pat yourself on the back. Say out loud, "That was awesome. You ROCK." Okay, maybe you don't want to do that when other people are around – on the other hand, maybe you do. But when you're all alone, practicing on the range? Hell, yeah! Losers are afraid to be proud of their skill level. This is one of the basic differences between winners and losers. Winners *glory* in their skill level. We *like* being good.

A more subtle form of negative self-talk is found with the folks who, when approaching something they consider difficult, say, "Well...I'll try." No. "I'll try," is just another way of saying, "I don't think I can do that." In "The Empire Strikes Back" when Yoda tells Luke Skywalker to lift his crashed X-wing out of the swamp, and Luke doesn't believe the Force can possibly move an object that huge and heavy, he says, "All right, I'll give it a try." Yoda says, "No. Try not. Do...or do not. There is no 'try.'" After Luke tries and fails, Yoda, using the Force, easily lifts the X-Wing from the swamp. Luke says, "I don't...I don't believe it." Yoda says, "That is why you fail." Not to give, perhaps, too much weight to this piece of mass-market entertainment, but Jedi Master Yoda had a point. Expunge "I'll try" from your vocabulary, replace it with "I will," and guess what? You will!

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