

**Trusting Your Shot**  
*Conscious and Subconscious Shooting and other Mental Matters*  
**By Don Morrison**

We become proficient archers by developing good shot execution, and repeating our shot time after time until we shoot each arrow identically. In the beginning, we consciously think about shooting form. We go through each phase of the process of shooting and think about how to do it right. Over time through solid practice, we begin to automate our shot sequence. We are able to subconsciously shoot a good shot. There is a big breakthrough when we get to the point that we can execute our shot automatically and subconsciously. It is a process of developing mind over matter. It is difficult to consciously think and process more than one thing at a time. Yet the subconscious mind is great at multi-tasking. We tend to shoot much better when the conscious mind is focusing on one thing at a time (e.g. aiming) and the subconscious mind is guiding our shot execution.

When the pressure is on and we're trying to shoot our best at the big tournament, we tend to become more conscious of our shot. We may try too hard to focus on every element of the shot process, from stance to grip to draw, to aim, release, etc. However, we generally shoot worse when we do that.

This may not happen when casually practicing on the range as we may trust our subconscious and muscle memory to shoot the same shot sequence we've practiced a thousand times. Generally, it appears to be human nature to let the subconscious mind take over for most things, so we need to train ourselves to resist becoming too conscious of our shot, and continue to let the subconscious be in control. It's somewhat like subconscious driving. Highway hypnosis, also known as white line fever, is a mental state in which a person can drive a truck or automobile great distances, responding to external events in the expected manner with no recollection of having consciously done so. That is an ideal state for archers.

Of course, that is easier said than done. How do we get to the point where we aren't thinking too much and letting ourselves shoot the way we've trained? For one, don't overthink every aspect of your shot execution. Trust your training. Second, do not think about having to hit the X. Trying really hard is trying too hard and generally leads to lower scores. Third, don't think about how many points you may be ahead or behind. Just shoot one arrow at a time. That's all you can really do anyway.

This does not mean you should be complacent or lackadaisical. Strive to achieve an ideal level of effort that allows you to shoot your best, but in a relaxed manner. As in many sports, a paradox is that you tend to do better when you're having fun at what you're doing. I've heard numerous winning basketball or football teams say they just went out and had fun playing the game. That is a key.

At one indoor state tournament a couple of years ago I was shooting next to a guy who frequently shoots perfect scores. For some reason, he was really struggling with his shot execution that day. The tournament had already become a grind for him, even though we had only shot a couple of ends. He was still hitting the X, but you could readily see he was

struggling with his shot. After a couple of ends, the inevitable happened, and he dropped an arrow a couple of rings outside the X. He knew then he would not win the tournament as there were a number of other shooters he suspected would shoot a perfect round. Then a funny thing happened. He relaxed. He no longer looked like he was struggling. He lightened up and decided to just have fun the rest of the tournament. And when he did, he began to pound the X, and never dropped another point the rest of the shoot.

It makes it a lot easier to relax, have fun, and shoot up a storm when we have prepared well. The time to really try hard is not at the tournament, but in the preparation and the practice. We need to practice as perfectly as we can to get our ideal shot execution down pat. Then, when it comes tournament time, we need to trust our preparation. Train well and shoot every practice arrow with the best shot execution you can. Then trust your preparation. Like a basketball player who shoots 100 free throws a day. When he gets to the line with the game's outcome in the balance, he trusts his preparation and doesn't think about the shot, he just does it like he has thousands of times before. Relax and let it happen, don't try to make it happen. Making it happen is putting the conscious mind on the court and thinking about how you're going to shoot. Just let it happen. Trust your shot. Trust your preparation.

One thing that has helped me is visualization. It does help to visualize success. Those positive affirmations do help us perform better. Before I draw the bow I try and visualize my shot execution, ending with the arrow hitting the X. Then I subconsciously shoot the actual shot. Once we practice enough to get our shot down consistently, thinking about the shot at tournament time just gets in the way. Once our shot sequence becomes automatic through repeated practice, it's best to just put our shot on cruise control.