



Mind vs Target: Six steps to winning in the clay target mind field

**Author: Bob Palmer,
CEO and High Performance Strategist – SportExcel Inc.**

Excerpt #1

Book Foreword by Don Kwasnycia

If there was something you could do to give yourself the advantage in your performance that is undetectable in saliva, blood or urine by any lab or testing device of modern sports authorities, would you do it? We're talking about something that is going to make you stand out from the rest and improve your performance almost overnight so that it shows in your results and gets people talking and suspicious. We are speaking about something that will not only have people noticing your results but noticing how different you are from the last competition, and may even start asking questions such as what vitamins are you taking — or worse. And we are talking about something that is undetectable, period.

And did I say you'd look different, taller; your muscles will appear to be more defined; you will walk taller and speak with authority and confidence. Come on. Would you do this if no saliva, blood, urine or genetic test could detect the minutest trace of this, and it would give you a significant advantage over your opponents, give you incredible visual acuity, strength and absolute focus, totally undetectable by anyone in anyway? Would you be tempted?"

Well, fortunately, I'm not talking about ethics or drugs or cheating here. But I am talking about the Zone and the revolutionary way it gives you excellence in your game. So don't just read— learn — and allow Bob to teach you this very basic concept of the Zone.

- Don Kwasnycia, Skeet Coach and Past Canadian Olympian



Excerpt # 2

On being the starting point of high performance

This book is the starting point where you will understand what you learned or didn't learn from all your competitive experience, from playing Little League baseball, football, hockey or other sports, to your latest attempts to win in the clay target sports. High performance is the process of doing anything well. In shooting, it is staying sharp, target after target, and understanding the nature of the distractions that conspire to pull you out of that focus. Whether you are a novice shooter or a professional, feel free to dream and to strive for your dreams, as you read and apply the strategies in this book.

But this book is more than just reading, of course. It is a specially designed high performance system based on years of training hundreds of athletes to be successful at all levels of competition, in addition to my professional education — book learning and experience — that shaped my thinking.

Excerpt #3

On how the Zone is accessible to beginners

No shooting skill needs to be attached to the Zone because the Zone is a skill in itself. Beginners can feel absolutely euphoric on the shooting range or course and still miss target after target in the learning process. In so doing, however, they will learn very quickly with no frustration or discouragement. And with proper coaching, they can move through classes and become All-Americans and Master Class shooters, exercising and practicing both their shooting skill set and their Zone skill.

So, the Zone is a skill that is a pleasant and satisfying euphoria within the context of a skillful game. And as soon as you add that last part — the pressure of competition, dreams of being an All-American, measurement of yourself against your peers — the achievement and maintenance of the Zone becomes a lot more challenging, interesting and fun.



Excerpt #4

On how losing makes you stronger

When I think back to my competitive years in the martial arts, I had my share of really enjoyable successes but I also had my share of incredibly fabulous losses — yes, fabulous losses. This notion that losses can be useful and that there are benefits to losing, often sparks disbelief. How could losing and feeling bad be good? As much as I enjoyed winning — and it was the only reason I was in the game in the first place — losing forced me into many difficult corners that I had to fight my way out of. Each corner proved to be an incredible opportunity to get fed up and quit — or, fight through it and, in the process, develop physical skills, realign mental strategies and test my commitment to my sport.

I know you are probably tired of hearing that you learn much more from losing than winning. So, instead of leaving you hanging with this advice, I'm going to teach you to get very excited when you lose so that you can wring every last drop out of what it is teaching you.

Excerpt #5

On processing goals differently

Within the shooting sports there are notable shotgunners always in the shoot-offs. Somehow they learned to be consistent by way of incredible talent, many hours of training and many hours fighting through vast numbers of competition targets. So you ask yourself, can I ever catch up and become as good as they are? And can I possibly do it sooner rather than later? Most things being equal (equipment, coaching and range time), in this chapter I am going to show you how you can begin to equal the playing field by putting in extra practice time and competing in hundreds of additional tournaments — at no cost and minimal time — just by processing your goals a bit differently and seeing them as “done deals” or outcomes.



Except #6

On setting goals

I've been asked, "Isn't going for the prize and the glory everyone's outcome?" Of course it is — but that's only a part of it. There are a wealth of other components that can give perspective and balance. There has to be, or why would so many shotgunners bother to come back year after year to the competitions when there are only a few winners?

When setting outcomes for competitions, I encourage athletes to start with their dream of winning the big prize. Then I get them to enrich the experience by stepping back and creating sub-outcomes that will ultimately support that dream. I ask one simple question of every shotgunner: "If you were to have fun and be in the Zone for the whole competition, how would you do?" The answer is usually "I'd do well." This is the first complementary outcome to winning: *Stay in the Zone*.

Excerpt #7

On creating a plan with your year's goals

As you approach any new season, you'll be excitedly gnawing on the bit with all manner of possibilities for the shooting adventure that lies ahead. You'll be rested, having taken some time off to recover from a year of competitions. Shooters in snowy northern climes are forced to take a break, but it is crucial for everyone to have a rest, whether your previous year was wildly successful, or not. But with the hibernation over, this is the point in the season, before any targets are smoked or missed, to set your specific outcomes for the year. When you project what you want to achieve — in a checklist fashion — you'll know month by month if you are achieving them and making any progress in your game.

Aw, you might say, but I'm only a recreational shooter and setting specific outcomes makes recreational shooting sound like work. Well, it is, and it does, but only at the beginning of the season. Once you get into full stride, it'll make your season easier. That is because setting your own outcomes puts the responsibility in your hands. Here is the choice:



- 1) You can have your colleagues—some who may be very negative and disruptive — set outcomes for you;
- 2) You can allow your subconscious mind — with all its negative self-talk and minor phobias — to set outcomes for you; or
- 3) You can be the one to set them consciously. Outcomes are going to happen and it is just a matter of how, and by whom, they get set.

Excerpt #8

On Staying in charge of your game

I believe that in sport, there are no winners or losers; only those who actively participate in guiding their mindset in regards to their outcomes, and those who leave it to chance (or to others). When I watch any professional sport, it usually takes me one look at the posture of the coach and athlete during a game to know whether they are either winning or losing.

Unfortunately, for most athletes, *The Game* runs their lives instead of them running *The Game*. *The Game* can be like a two-year-old. It cooperates or throws a tantrum, or more than likely swings back and forth between cooperation and war. Would you let a toddler run your life at the grocery checkout demanding and grabbing for the box of candy bars until he got one? Not likely. But if you allow yourself to get embarrassed by the other shoppers' impatience, you might succumb to the pressure and lose your cool (aka the Zone).

In the same manner many of us let our shooting game get away from us until it runs our lives — embarrassment from squad mates watching us, frustration that the new shotgun fits and performs poorly, anger that the new lessons have produced poorer results than promised. We need to take charge and tame that toddler by staying with the feeling you learned in the previous chapters. Staying in charge of your Zone, and *The Game* — win or lose — will take care of itself and magic can happen.



Excerpt #9

On being guided to the Zone from the get-go

Many athletes and teams have an expectation that one can work their way into the Zone station by station, inning by inning or quarter by quarter. That was my expectation when I played hockey as a young athlete. Sometimes it worked, because in hockey, a team can play dismally for two periods and then they find the Zone and win the game. But when I competed in the martial arts it was a different story. In less than a minute I could be out of the competition after traveling at great expense and time. That is where I learned the importance of being in the Zone from the outset. Waiting to feel good on the podium at the end the match usually ended in disaster. I needed my signal. I needed GPS (Guidance).

When we travel through a major urban area, we are guided by not one, but many traffic lights. We stop on red, go on green and proceed with extreme caution on amber. Except for rush hour, the system works pretty well. Now imagine if all the traffic lights are cloaked on our side of the intersection and the only way for us to tell if they are red, green or amber is to proceed through the intersection and look in the rearview mirror. It would be very scary and life threatening. Soon every intersection would produce anxiety and fear and we'd be stuck — too scared to move.

And yet that is how many of us compete in shooting competitions. We step into the station or post jittery and nervous — red light — and somehow expect to shoot well. Feeling bad before a round is like anticipating a collision at every intersection. On the other hand, feeling great after running a station or having a perfect round is like looking in the rearview mirror to see that the light *was* green.

Excerpt #10

On setting our own goals rather than having others setting them for us

One summer I walked the golf course with one of my clients and had him practice the skills he had learned with which to stay in the Zone. The golf course was beautiful, the man's game was focused, the weather was exceptional and then it started to turn ugly. Not the weather — me. I



started talking non-stop, crinkled a water bottle and told a very a good joke (that he didn't get.) I warned him it was coming, and he listened — to everything.

I was testing his ability to stay in the Zone by setting blocks in the way of his game. Oh yes, he knew his outcome was to stay in the Zone and to play well, but I had my outcome too and that was to teach him a lesson. My outcome was to get him to accept my devious task of undermining his game. And I was having fun planting suggestions for him to plunk his ball in the water hazard, or slice it into the rough, or skip it across the green into the sand.

And I must have been very good at it, because he accepted my outcome very quickly. His first shot did plunk into the water hazard; the second shot lay slightly in the rough; the third was way short of the green; the fourth was a long putt to the hole; and the fifth a two-putt. In summary, I had effectively drawn his attention away from HIS outcome to birdie the hole to my outcome for him of wrecking his game. I set up some very effective blocks to his success.

Our level of attention (or inattention) is the product of how powerful our outcomes are. You now know that it is better for us to set deliberate, powerful outcomes rather than let them be set inadvertently by subconscious minds or by others. However, outcomes do get misdirected and we need to identify when that happens, because these types of blocks affect our GPS (internal guidance), even when delivered “out of our awareness” at a subconscious level. Crinkling water bottles, we can challenge; subliminal suggestions from advertisers or hints to miss the target, we can't. People — some devious, some inadvertent — can dredge up and trigger past No-Zone experiences of failure and we are letting them.

Anchors attach themselves to all situations. In shooting, great feelings are attached to the light, perfect feel of the shotgun, the crisp, bright image of the target, the warmth of the sun, the flow of our gun mount, the smoothness of our gun swing and the ink-balled target. And bad feelings can become attached to dropped targets, distracting comments, multiple misses, buffeting winds and obnoxious people. The actual response to these anchors can be smiles and adrenalized excitement or curses and tantrums — all of which are triggered automatically — by accidental and purposeful gestures, comments and touches.

But there's good news. We can redirect how we respond to these kinds of anchors.



Excerpt #11

On enjoying missed targets

There is sad fact about training in any clay target sport and it is this: The more you practice shooting, the more targets you'll miss. And the more you miss the more it can hurt to miss (even as you might be becoming a better shot.) Similarly, the more tournaments you enter, the more you'll have the opportunity to miss even more targets, at least at the outset. And the more people you meet at tournaments, the greater the likelihood that you'll be embarrassed many more times by those missed targets than if you just stayed at home and watched a movie. I know I'm looking at clay target shooting via a glass half empty versus one half full, but go to any competition and a huge number of people get very upset by missing targets. So I'm figuring that they must have practiced missing (a lot) to get that annoyed with it or embarrassed by it. So there must be a "glass half empty" group that needs help. Even though they know that missing is part of getting better at the game, accumulated misses are taking a toll on many of them.

So it bears asking the question: Why do we do this to ourselves? Is it the hope of riches and fame? Not for many of us in clay target shooting. So what is it then? Is it the challenge? Maybe, but with the behaviors I've seen across many sports, including golf, a lot of recreational athletes would like it to be a lot simpler. Is it the friendship? That is a given, but many shotgunners might want to read the book: "How to Win Friends and Influence People," by Dale Carnegie. Is it the level of machismo? Perhaps. And even a willingness to be cannon fodder so that others may bask in their glory of victory at your expense.

So besides being an outdoors sport with lots of fresh air and sun, I'm stumped as to why so many would willingly practice missing target after target and:

- 1) Be nervous at the future prospect of missing them;
- 2) Get angry at actually missing them;

AND

- 3) Be distracted by others missing them.



I apologize for sounding negative here, but the emotional angst caused by missed targets is serious and there is a better way. I stumbled upon it during my competitive karate career:

You have to enjoy adversity (love to miss) before you can ever enjoy winning.

In my case with the martial arts, I had to “enjoy” the pain of getting hurt, whether from my own lack of skill or someone else’s over-exuberance.

To purchase a paperback or e-version copy of Mind vs Target, [click here](#).

