



Coaching involves a lot of communication and contact with other people

Coaching column Every coach a beginner at one time

By Vladimir Galiabovitch

Coaching involves a lot of communication and contact with other people and, as with any other job, the coach may be highly qualified but that level of qualification depends on the desire, abilities and working environment of each coach.

It is often the work of the club coach who lays the foundations of a champion with his/her instruction of the first steps in shooting. Therefore it is important that the correct advice is used in the process of developing the shooter's technique regardless of his/her age and/or gender. But the main objective of the coach must be to create an enjoyable environment for the shooter who will quickly lose interest in the sport if it is not fun.

Everyone has a different reason as to why they enjoy shooting therefore the coach must be interested in and learn about the student and so determine the best method(s) of instruction that will achieve the goals of each student from the very beginning. Age, sex, fitness, motor skills and nervous system all play a part in determining the varying abilities of the beginner and this is the coach's field of function.

I am often asked "how to work with beginners?" and while the answer is not necessarily simple and straight forward, the basic structure of coaching, with some variations, include the *Stance, Grip, Trigger Control, Follow Through, Sighting, Aiming and Breath Control*.

The beginner is usually keen to do everything, but as coaches we are also keen to give the novice as little as an overview and then allow him/her the freedom to shoot any match at competition. However the beginner must take and be given the time to develop his/her skill and experience in shooting to achieve his/her first goal(s). This will depend on the coach's first instructions and his/her personal knowledge as a shooter or a coach.

My first steps as a coach were the same as for every person taking up the coaching challenge. I am an experienced shooter and early in my coaching career I was given the opportunity to coach the Belarusian State University Team. My first training sessions were with students who had already achieved between B grade and Master grade, training two 1.5 hour sessions per week. Some included an additional weekly training session at their local club.

Because these athletes were experienced shooters our main goal was to prepare them for local, regional and national competitions. Our team was successful but not long thereafter I became uncomfortable about my level of knowledge of training or of the coaching process. I enrolled in the Academy of Physical Culture and Sports to develop my coaching skills while also working as a professional coach. During that time I experienced many situations that I was not fully prepared for. Still, I ran the national training camps and worked with many pistol and rifle shooters of international standing such as V. Zidic, V. Tolkach, Y. Pivovarov and S. Martinov.

The difficulty came when, at the same time that I was coaching high level athletes, I undertook the responsibility of coaching a huge crowd of beginners aged from 12 to 20 years. It then became obvious that safety is the main issue that a coach must deal with at the very beginning. I came to understand that training sessions should be carefully planned to ensure that all participants achieve maximum effort.

It is likely that during the first training session, after safety instruction and briefing of the shooting technique, the beginner is given an opportunity to shoot. The coach must observe the shooter's action, physical ability, coordination and ability to focus, listen and replicate the movement in subsequent shots etc. It is also important that at this stage the coach determines the appropriate instruction and how it will be delivered.

People have various ways of absorbing information and this is determined by the person's specific predilection i.e. visual, auditory, kinesthetic etc. Task presentation may therefore include a combination of methods for delivering instruction such as an explanation (verbal/auditory), a poster or schematic display (visual) and/or a practical demonstration accompanied by an explanation (kinesthetic/verbal).

The position and/or proximity of the coach to the beginner during observation must be considered carefully to allow the coach to easily react to and correct the shooter's action if required.

The shooting skill of the coach is an important coaching tool but having said that, the coach does not have to be an expert shooter. Each coach must use his/her strongest qualities/abilities and if he/she cannot perfectly perform a movement the coach can seek someone else's assistance to demonstrate the correct shooting action. However, the coach must have the technical knowledge and the ability to explain and give reasons why any part of the movement is correct and/or incorrect.

Remember, that each question must have a correct answer and the coach will not lose face if he/she can't provide that answer immediately. It is better to take the time to find the correct answer and pass it on later rather than give incorrect advice.

Let's look at the final stage of a shot. The shot will be well executed if the front and rear sights are aligned, the grip is consistent, the shooter's body is steady and trigger pressure does not alter sight alignment. There are not many people who can execute this task from the very beginning. People with physical strength will develop this skill much quicker than those with less physical strength therefore the shooter's fitness in conjunction with the development of the shooting technique is important for the development of the young shooter.

When a coach is faced with a group of shooters with very diverse physical abilities it is necessary to provide a training environment suited to each. Each training session should not only be

productive but also interesting for the shooter. For beginners the use of different types of shooting adds interest to the training session.

Such variations may include:

- ▶ shooting with the gun and arm supported
- ▶ shooting with only the gun supported
- ▶ shooting with only the arm supported at the wrist in various ways
- ▶ shooting at shorter distances e.g. up to 10 meters using a 0.22 firearm
- ▶ shooting without a target
- ▶ shooting without vision control
- ▶ shooting at a blank target
- ▶ shooting at an old target with a number of holes
- ▶ shooting at two targets
- ▶ shooting at cans or balls to add a little fun

By easing the conditioning of shooting we achieve two goals. The first is to observe only one part of the shooter's technique. The coach will find it easier to determine correct instruction as per the shooter's action, fitness and/or ability etc.

The second goal is to produce a precise single action. It is recommended that the shooter spends quite a lot of time observing his/her hold and applying different levels of power when gripping. This is necessary for developing the correct holding technique.

The position of the finger and how pressure is applied on the trigger is also important to consider. It is essential that the movement of the trigger finger starts from the joint between the second and third phalanges. The finger will touch the trigger at the very center of the first phalange pad or somewhere closer to the joint, if a finger is long. See *Pistol Shooting* by Laslo Antal and Ragnar Scanaker for a more detailed explanation.

The movement of the finger must be well practised with observation of the trigger squeezing movement analysed for correctness after each action. The finger muscles can be taught to perform the movement correctly and it is the job of the coach to teach the beginner to execute gripping and triggering as well as possible from the very beginning. It is useful to use variations of arm support when developing the correct trigger action. The beginner will learn to follow through the triggering action while keeping grip pressure consistent for some time after the shot. "Follow through" requires the continuous action of all muscles, aiming and holding the breathing for some time after the shot is fired.

There are other important elements of the shooting technique not discussed in this article but it is the job of the coach to determine the elements that apply specifically to each shooter and structure his/her instruction accordingly. 🌟