


# THINK INSIDE THE BOX

SAYS DAVE HOLMES

Some would suggest that we are all individuals and our thoughts, feelings and sentiments have every bit as much credibility and significance as everybody else's (but theirs). They will claim it takes a village to raise a child, when some of us less erudite types thought parents could do the job. They somewhat condescendingly say that everyone is a winner – and then leave the ghetto in a limo. The simple truth is that most of us are average.

We have average jobs, average incomes, average families, exceptional kids until we see their grade cards, average wood on our gun stocks and we shoot average scores. It's a tough job, but most of us have to do it. If it wasn't for us average types, the exceptional ones would lose their identities. As the critically important majority of 'averagites', we tend to miss targets in average ways. That's good – because it means that a cure for a problem can be applicable to lots of people.

We aren't going to talk about lots of targets here though, mostly just those going to the gun side – right to left for left-handers. Uh-oh, that did it! We screwed up all the average right-handed people because they have never in their lives had to automatically turn everything around like left-handers are expected to do all the time. OK lefties – go back to the auto-transpose mode. The average leftie can do that quite well, so I'll write this for the average rightie.



HERE ONE CAN SEE THE SHOULDER BACK, THE LEAN OF THE HEAD TO THE RIGHT AND THE MUZZLES BEHIND THE TARGET. IT RESULTS IN A MISS BECAUSE OF THE SHOOTER'S INABILITY TO GET THE MUZZLE WHERE IT NEEDED TO GO BECAUSE HIS BODY MECHANICS WERE KILLING THE SWING.



**LEFT: IF THE SWING STAYS "IN THE BOX" UNTIL THE END, THE HEAD WILL BE CENTERED OVER THE BODY, THE ROTATION OF THE BODY UNINHIBITED AND THE MOVEMENT OF THE FRONT HAND AND MUZZLE ON PACE WITH THE TARGET. NOTICE THERE IS NO LEAN AT THE WAIST OR SHOULDERS. RIGHT: CONTRAST THIS MOVE, WITH THE SHOULDERS FALLING TO THE RIGHT, WITH THE PROPER MOVE. HERE YOU CAN SEE THE BEND AT THE WAIST, THE HEAD TO THE RIGHT WITH THE SHOULDER DRAGGING THE MUZZLES. THAT ISN'T A FORMULA FOR CONSISTENCY.**

**THE LEAN IS SUCH A NATURAL MOVEMENT – WE OFTEN DON'T EVEN KNOW WE ARE DOING IT. IT CREEPS INTO THE SHOOTING STROKE LIKE JACK THE RIPPER SLIPPING DOWN A DARK ALLEY, SLOWLY, INSIDIOUSLY, WITH NO GOOD RESULT FOR THE UNSUSPECTING VICTIM.**

## **AN AVERAGE CROSSER**

The targets are traveling left to right. They are crossing our average field of vision at an average speed or less, so they don't really 'drive' the gun. What's the number one reason the average shooter misses these pretty average targets? In my experience, incorrect lead usually gets the blame, but the real culprit is almost always trying to 'lean' the gun into the lead. Watch shooters on a slow target. Many will be leaning sideways like a reed in the wind by the time they pull the trigger. The curse of the lean is simply that as the gun shoulder goes sideways, the muzzle of the gun loses its initiative, getting drug by the shoulder instead of pushed by the

front hand. As the shoulders drop, the muzzle is also pulled off the target line. This transition means that 'eye-to-hand' co-ordination is lost. Target speed and muzzle speed lose their dynamic relationship. Sight pictures that look right (as in "*I swear that target should have broken!*") don't work. Then we get even more careful, dragging the muzzle even more on the next shot as we try hard to pull together the perfect picture.

The lean is such a natural movement – we often don't even know we are doing it. It creeps into the shooting stroke like Jack the Ripper slipping down a dark alley, slowly, insidiously, with no good result for the unsuspecting victim. How do we beat it? Think inside the box.

## **HAND-TO-EYE CO-ORDINATION**

Most of us hate tight shooting cages, but visualize that you are standing in a restricted space (the box) in which the only part of our body that is confined is the shoulders – but allows the elbows to pass through its bounds without encumbrance. Because of the imagined restriction, the body now becomes a pivoting 'rod', with the front foot our pivot point. It is very difficult to throw a target that can outrun the hands if the hands are free to 'pursue' it. Witness the ability of the best to hit 100 mph baseballs delivered from sixty feet and return 120 mph tennis serves. While the average Joe can't handle those, the 20-60 mph targets we

deal with are duck soup by comparison. If the eyes can see it, give the hands a chance and they'll deliver every time.

How do we do that? We have to keep the body in an assist mode, rather than a lead role – the very reason we don't call it 'eye-to-body' coordination. It's the hands that respond so easily to the flight of a target – provided the body stays out of the way!

Why is it so hard to keep the body out of things? It's probably just the way we are wired. It takes a pretty boring ball game to keep us from using a little body language to help the home team. We try to lean a shot into the basket watching NBA games. We strain with a fullback trying to beat

his way into the end zone. We like to move. Body language is natural. It's therefore not surprising to learn that we lean when we shoot – because we really want to hit the target. When we want to be really careful, we tend to lean even more.

Hence the box – cramped though it may seem. This visualized concept keeps the shoulders balanced over the hips where they will follow the front hand. A simple approach to help keep the shoulders 'in' is to push the front-hand shoulder blade sideways with the back-hand shoulder blade. This not only keeps the right shoulder from drifting out, but the momentum created flows out the other side of the body – assisting the front hand

movement. Pushing the blades keeps the shoulders in the box.

If you want to practice the concept, find an armless bench or chair and sit on it and try dry mounting your gun – or better still, shoot from a chair for real. Lean sideways while sitting with a shotgun hanging from your shoulder and you will quickly discover the meaning of instability, since the legs aren't there to handle the weight shift. As an exercise, it affirms the efficiency of using the hands to 'chase' the target and the wisdom of keeping the body out of the lead role.

You probably won't like it at first. I watched Roger Silcox introduce the idea to a group of six shooters some years ago. Five of

the six in the class left the station mumbling because it wasn't as easy as they thought it should be and they gave no thought to doing it again! But it's worth sticking with it until the move becomes 'easy'. When you then stand, you won't believe how easily you can move the gun with a leading front hand and a 'quiet' body.

Given the correct stance to begin with, shooting in the box keeps your weight on the front foot with your body as a pivoting 'rod', which in turn creates fair opportunity for the front hand to drive the muzzles relative to target speed. It is fascinating to stand behind shooters and watch the difference in the rhythm of muzzle movement when a shooter is 'in the box' – eye-to-hand co-ordination is maximized.

## KEEP ON LEANING

The alternative is to continue shoulder leaning (even for those that don't believe they do it), which creates a weight shift to the back foot that is an additional muzzle-momentum killer. The weight shift drains the speed off the muzzle with predictable results. Sight pictures look good, the target doesn't break and the shooter is left to wonder. The cure isn't a different sight picture. It isn't a new gun, a different shell or a different lead technique – it's simply thinking 'inside the box', creating the perfect platform for the shoulders to follow the front hand as it drives the muzzle to the break point.

Sit down and think about it for a couple of minutes and see if you don't have an easier time of it when you get back on your feet. Then, the next time you miss a target that should have broken, tell yourself "Nothing but hands." You'll have the cure all boxed up, ready to deliver. ■



**MAYBE YOU NEED TO SIT DOWN AND THINK ABOUT IT? STEVE WAS STRUGGLING WITH CONSISTENCY BECAUSE THE SHOULDER WAS DROPPING BACK, SUCKING THE LIFE OUT OF HIS SWING. WE TOOK THE LOWER HALF OF THE BODY OUT OF THE EQUATION AND HE RAN THE FIRST 23 TARGETS. THE MAGIC IS IN THE HANDS!**