

Lanny Bassham



# Decisiveness!

*Decisiveness is the noun form of the adjective decisive and it is a powerful quality to have on your side when competing. One definition of the word is "having the power to determine an outcome beyond doubt." Wow! Decisiveness is power. How does that sound?*

It is the advantage of the resolved and the edge of the determined. Yet, you are not born with it. No one can give it to you. No one can do it for you. It is priceless and you cannot buy it. No matter how hard you work, you cannot earn it. It is invisible yet everyone can see it in those who have it. It comes easiest to the skilled and evades those that seek the easy path to success. It is available to everyone, yet few have it and it is one characteristic that you cannot afford to do without. If you want it there is only one way to get it. You make a decision and it is there.

Decisiveness is also a quality that, once acquired, alters the very fabric of your self image on the shooting line. It empowers you to perform at the very top of your technical skill. You can see the dramatic effect of this decision in the best of shooters when they enter the range. Without conscious effort their posture seems to change. Their shoulders seem to set a little straighter and their chin lifts just a bit. Their eyes seem to have a quiet focus down-range and you can almost hear them thinking "This is going to be a great day!" You can sense the energy begin to radiate through their movements. There is a feeling that they have been here before and all will go well. There is trust that they can execute proper form and duplicate the execution. This confidence is beyond conscious thought and cannot be faked. It is available only to the prepared performer. It is a weapon against failure that knows few equals.

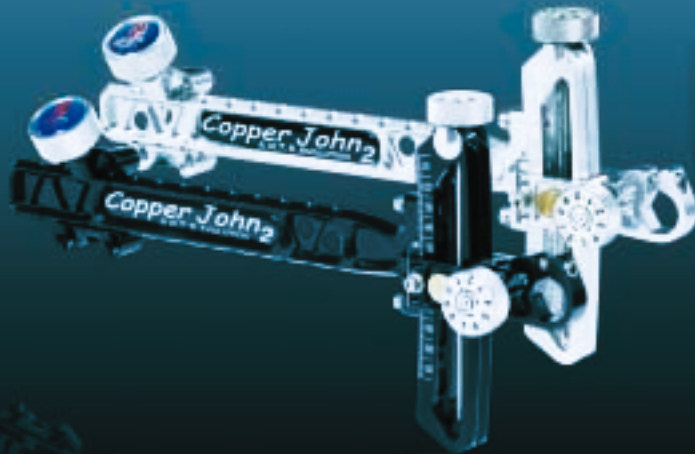
So, would you ever wish to be indecisive; to give up this huge advantage and risk failure? You would think not, but it happens way too often in competitions. Although there may be dozens of reasons that this can occur, I believe that there are three primary reasons for lack of decisiveness: we might become indecisive because we are new to the sport, ill-prepared for the event, or overly-cautious in our planning. Let's take a look at these one at a time.

***"We find that new shooters focus too much on what they are doing wrong and do not give themselves enough credit in the areas that they are doing well."***

Are you new to the sport? Everyone is a novice in the beginning and it is perhaps impossible for us to be very decisive when we

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start anything new. I have a few suggestions though. View your first few competitions only as learning experiences. Evaluate what you are doing well and be decisive about what you know you can do correctly. As your skill and execution improves you will have more to become decisive about and you may find that you will gain confidence in all areas of your performance. We find that new shooters focus too much on what they are doing wrong and do not give themselves enough credit in the areas that they are doing well. Trying not to make a mistake is a sure way of making one. Every shot is a teaching moment, if we are open to be taught. Do not forget to reinforce what you are doing well. Too often the focus is only about correcting errors. Next, and this is applicable to veterans as well as newcomers, discipline yourself to only think and talk about what you need to do, not about what you did when referring to your performance. Talking about what you need to do builds self

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image, but talking about error tends to tear it down. A statement like ‘I need to be more decisive’ is an aid to your self image growth but ‘I’m just not decisive’ reinforces error.

Also, remember the best time to ask for help is in the beginning. Some archers seem afraid to ask questions for fear that they will sound foolish. We all remember when we were beginners and we will not make you feel nearly as uncomfortable as continuing to make a mistake will seem. Most of the more experienced competitors are quick to help you but you need to let them know that you need their help. Remember, we are happy you are here and we want to encourage you.

Ill-prepared? For the ill-prepared, we have all been there. We hoped we were not too ill-prepared when we left home for the competition, but it just seemed to turn out to be that way. You will have times when you

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seem to struggle and wonder if you can get through this. It is really difficult to be decisive at this point. Human nature is telling you to worry about this upcoming challenge and a bit of trepidation sets in. My suggestion is to work the problem. All you can do is to perform with what you have brought with you. You are not going to manufacture anything new at this point and you must be careful not to let the concern over a frustration cause your performance to deteriorate on the things you can do well. Stay strong in your attitude about what you can do.

Sometimes beginning shooters think that they should not attempt competitions until they are fully prepared. The only problem is that you will never be fully prepared. Some things cannot be prepared for in training and you must learn them in competitions. You are going to have challenges and that is okay. We learn best when we fail while attempting. You cannot learn much if you have not the courage to make an attempt at all.

Are you overly cautious? When the weather is bad while driving your car, you exercise caution. When you have to move around in the dark you are cautious. If you have to make a big decision you are taught by your mentors to use caution. Normally caution is a good thing, but too much of it can paralyze an archer in a match. There is a fine line between indecision and caution. A slight hesitation on your part in reading the wind and your shot is spoiled. Remember the chance that you will execute your shot well is directly related to the quality of your attitude just prior to the arrow being released. If you are cautious, instead of decisive, while aiming you may over-hold causing you to move as you shoot. A decisive shooter has fewer aborts and a greater number of tens.

To avoid excess caution you might find that rehearsing your shot several times in your mind prior to shooting should help. Oh, you do that already! Good for you. So, if that is a good idea then why not include in your rehearsal that you are decisive when you step up to the line, that you stay decisive, and you are sure of yourself while shooting. It will aid you greatly in avoiding the pitfall of being too cautious.

Champions evaluate, decide, then act. There is not much room for caution there. I would rather see a shooter act decisively and make a mistake with conviction than fail to act at all hoping that the problem will just disappear. One of the best things about shooting is that there will be no points gained unless we put arrows in the scoring rings. No one else can shoot for you, there is no one else to blame, and there is a time limit to foil the procrastinator.

Sooner or later you must learn to become decisive. When you do all of your skills will sharpen. Why wait? It is but a decision away.

**Lanny Bassham** is an Olympic Coach and an Olympic Gold Medalist. He is a member of the Olympic Shooting Hall of Fame, ranks third among all shooters in total international medal count for the USA and is one of the most respected mental trainers in the world. His book **With Winning in Mind** and his *Mental Management*® concepts are used and endorsed by Olympian and World Champion shooters. You can reach him at 1.800.879.5079 or at [www.mentalmanagement.com](http://www.mentalmanagement.com).



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