

# POISE UNDER PRESSURE

***"To me what separates really good players from great players: execute well under pressure." - Tom Brady***

In 2011 Lawrence Ho, an average marksman, was curious. Lawrence intuitively knew grandmaster marksmen are just as fast as they are accurate. A friend didn't believe him so Lawrence decided to show everyone the difference.

Lawrence filmed himself and grandmaster Mike Digennaro at a shooting competition. Then he edited the clips side-by-side so the viewer can see the difference between a pro vs a schmo.

How stark is the difference?

Before Lawrence drew his gun and fired his first shot, the grandmaster was half way through the course. All the grandmaster's shots were on target. Lawrence's accuracy was 41.52%.

**Video** <sup>1</sup>



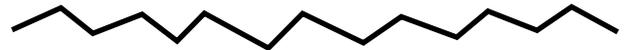
Then the grandmaster reloaded his gun and shot six different targets (all perfectly) in the time it took Lawrence to merely reload his gun.

**Video** <sup>2</sup>

To add insult to injury, Lawrence compared his last stage shoot with the grandmaster's performance. Since the grandmaster finished the stage quickly, Lawrence edited in the grandmaster shooting another stage again. The grandmaster finished 2 stages at 100% accuracy before Lawrence could finish one at 35%. **Video** <sup>3</sup>



Lawrence placed #11 of 31 participants versus the grandmaster who placed #1. Lawrence wasn't a complete beginner, he just looked like a noob compared to a grandmaster.



As I said before, We All Need Some Perspective <sup>4</sup>.

Most of us are average at best in each of our endeavors. Videos and stories like these show how obvious the contrast is between average and elite.



***"I'm way closer to LeBron James than you are to me." - Brian Scalabrine, former NBA player***

I think the video also shows another important piece of the equation:

The mark of a true master is poise under pressure.

<sup>1</sup> Video [https://youtu.be/ayHHCh-B\\_zo?t=34](https://youtu.be/ayHHCh-B_zo?t=34) <sup>2</sup> Video [https://youtu.be/ayHHCh-B\\_zo?t=216](https://youtu.be/ayHHCh-B_zo?t=216) <sup>3</sup> Video [https://youtu.be/ayHHCh-B\\_zo?t=164](https://youtu.be/ayHHCh-B_zo?t=164).  
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thewoodshedd.com/posts/2021-08-16-talentedistribution/>



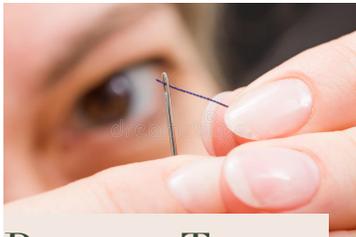
There was Michael Jordan scoring the winning shot with 5.2 seconds left in game 6 of the 1998 NBA finals.

Or Mariano Rivera saving 652 games as a relief pitcher for the Yankees.

Or Adam Vinatieri making the winning kick in multiple Super Bowls. Or Tom Brady coming back to win many, many games.

Pressure does not hinder the abilities of the best. It invigorates them to perform on a super human scale.

The grandmaster marksman had poise in spades. He operated efficiently, confidently and effortlessly. Amateurs, like Lawrence, flinch under pressure.



Purpose Tremor

What are the pressures these marksmen faced? Let's start with the obvious. Load a gun with live ammunition and it becomes a deadly weapon.

Then point that loaded gun at a target and a purpose tremor sets in. The grandmaster had no visible shake in his hands while Lawrence had a very noticeable shake.

Then there is the anticipation of and premature reaction to recoil. Known as "flinching", this reaction leads to missing the target. Additional emotional baggage such as fear, nervousness, excitement, ego, pride, impatience, etc are present in the amateur.



Flinching

As one marksman put it, all of these pressures **"clutter a shooter's ability to perform the simplest physical act of moving our fingertip a sixteenth of an inch."**

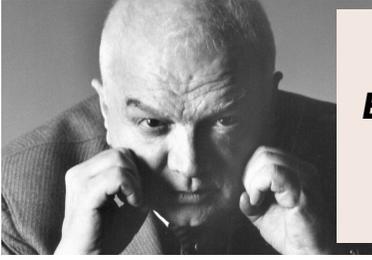
Read that again.

This is such a good model for mastery in any endeavor. If our own imagined pressures can sabotage moving our fingertips a sixteenth of an inch, you can begin to understand the havoc our nerves can make on more complex actions.

Start with investing. The act of investing is merely buy, sell or hold. But a vast majority of participants will underperform the market in the long run. The difference between the best investors and the rest is the ability to execute under pressure.

Warren Buffett likens his investing to hunting with an elephant gun. He is no different from the grandmaster marksman. Just as a grandmaster marksman can shoot a gun quickly and on target despite recoil, Buffett is a steward to tens of billions of dollars but doesn't flinch in anticipation of the mammoth potential recoil or blowback. Buffett has poise under pressure.

Buffett feels no pressure to act for the sake of making a move. He waits and waits for the split second window of opportunity. The amateurs are left sucking their thumbs or running for the hills. Buffett, is exceptionally fast and generally on target.



***Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” - Cus D’Amato***

When the market is in bull mode everyone is a long-term investor. But in crisis mode, average investors flinch, tense up, and disregard the fundamentals. The amateur’s emotional baggage clutters their ability to operate quickly and accurately. Some even head for the exits.

Amateurs act this way because of all of the perceived pressures. Like the pressure of managing other investors’ money or outperforming a benchmark. Then there is the fear of standing out and making a mistake which leads to investors mindlessly imitating the behavior of peers - often called the institutional imperative.

You can insert any skill into our model. Speaking in public, making a sale, performing music or running a business, etc can all have pressures which clutter a person’s ability to perform.

*“You try to put all of that pressure behind you. You try to think about just the kick and not the implications of what it means. This time of year it gets a little more difficult.. But, you try to... just focus in on the kick and not really concern yourself with all the other stuff.”*

**Adam Vinatieri - NFL Kicker**

One’s mindset has the greatest effect of all. Ideally, you want a calm, relaxed and empty mind when executing any skill. Otherwise, with too much tension, too much motivation or anxiety, your reflexes will be jammed. You won’t be able to think on your feet. You won’t be able to anticipate and improvise. In other words, you won’t be able to keep up with the

fast tempo or changing harmony (moving landscape).

Have you had an important job interview or other highly stressful situation where you were put on the spot? More often than not, pressure leaves your mind blank. Then when you are driving home, all of these great answers start to come to you without effort. The tension and anxiety jammed your subconscious. Then when the pressure was off, your mind was allowed to operate as intended. By then it was too late.

*“I would be sitting down and watching television and he (Cus) would say, ‘Let’s do a session.’ And he’d sit next to me and then (after closing my eyes) he’d say, ‘Transcend. Focus. Relax until you see yourself looking at yourself.”*

**Mike Tyson on Cus D’Amato**

Don’t concern yourself with all of your emotional baggage. The goal is to act intuitively and impersonally. A disembodied mindset is key. If you believe your job is to “aim”, and that someone else will do the action for you, you’ll be on the right track.

Marksmen say the only thought you should have while acting is “one of admiration for your sight picture.” Sight picture means placing your eye, rear sight and front sight in line with the target. For the non-shooter that is placing your mind’s eye and body in line with your targeted goal. In other words, mentally picture yourself executing on the goal.

# Dry-Fire Practice

*"Well, nobody prepares harder than Tom (Brady). He has great anticipation and awareness. He gets the ball quickly to the guys that have the best opportunity to make plays with it. We know he's not going to make yards with the ball in his hands. He needs to get the ball to someone else. And he does that quickly and efficiently." - Bill Belichick*

Once relaxed and you've admired your sight picture, it is time to dry-fire. Grandmaster marksmen spend most of practice time dry-firing, or without ammunition. And they practice a lot.

Why dry-fire? As stated earlier, one of the greatest pressures of shooting a live gun is the ammunition itself. Take out the live ammunition - or pressure - from the equation and there is no motivation to flinch.

Pressures vary from field to field and individual to individual. Try to figure out all of the pressures you face internally and externally. Whatever those pressures are, remove them.

I remember as a young boy trying to hit a baseball. Each time my friend threw the ball across the plate, I flinched and missed the ball. The anxiety and tension of the anticipation clouded my vision and jammed up my reflexes.

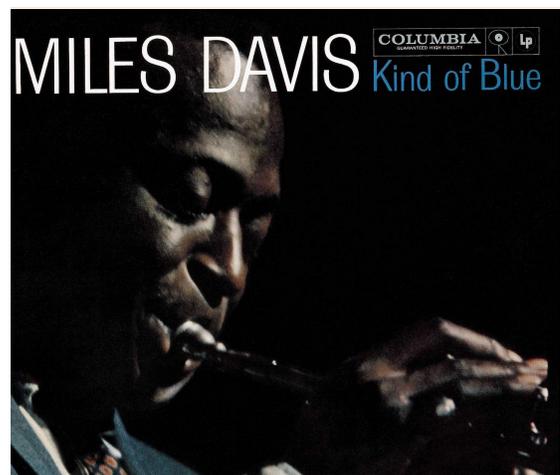
Coach then had me do the following. He said, "Relax. Don't even swing at the next 20 pitches. Keep your bat on your shoulder. Just make sure to keep your eye on the ball as it goes by." After the 20 pitches, I was then told to imagine hitting the ball as it came by. I did and was soon hitting the ball consistently.

Crisis situations move at lightning speed so your reaction speed is key. If you need to think, you'll be left in the dust.

That is why you must dry-fire until the action, executed perfectly, becomes a totally subconscious reflex. You'll get to the point where the action will occur faster than you can consciously think.

I cannot stress good habits, especially the fundamentals, enough. You must have the highest standards. The subconscious absorbs everything we do whether it's accurate or not. If you play an A minor scale on the guitar incorrectly 6 out of 7 times, your subconscious will repeat the flaw in the future. Mistakes can easily become habits that are hard to get rid of.

Start slow with perfect execution, then gradually add difficulty. Never waste time and energy beating yourself up about mistakes or poor performance. Just deal with the elements you wish to improve one at a time in a cool and collected way.



*"I'll play it first and tell you what it is later."*

*- Miles Davis*



*Practice with bat on shoulder*



*"I remember that we were playing "So What" one of Miles's compositions from the late 50s...*

*Tony Williams was burning on the drums. And right in the middle of Miles's solo, when he was playing one of his amazing solos, I played the wrong chord. A chord that just sounded completely wrong. It sounded like a big mistake.*

*Miles paused for a second and then he played some notes that made my chord right. He made it correct which astounded me.*

*I couldn't believe what I heard. Miles was able to make something that was wrong into something that was right with the power of his choice of notes that he made and that feeling that he had.*

*What I realize now is that Miles didn't hear it as a mistake. He heard it as something that happened, just as an event and so that was part of the reality of what was happening at the moment. He dealt with it."*

*- Herbie Hancock*

When I was starting Immersion Factory I had no photography experience. I dry-fired to get experience. I found people with properties that could use professional photos. I told them I wanted to create a portfolio and would photograph their property for free. There was no pressure. I practiced technique, how to handle clients and all sorts of situations in a no pressure zone.

## Let Loose, Be in the Moment

***"What I realize now is that Miles didn't hear it as a mistake. He heard it as something that happened, just as an event and so that was part of the reality of what was happening at the moment. He dealt with it."***

The future is unknown. All of this preparation allows one to react instantaneously to the reality of what is happening in the moment. It doesn't matter if reality is handing you a crisis full of lemons. Just deal with it.

A few times my clients have made a mistake in scheduling. For example, a client wrote the wrong address while booking. I showed up, did drone photography and called the agent when I couldn't find the key she said was in the mailbox. I could've gotten angry and frustrated. But I didn't. Like Miles Davis, I dealt with it positively. I made something wrong into something right. Clients eat that shit up.

None of this is hard to grasp. The difficulty is the constant execution performed over a long period. [Delayed Gratification Works](#)<sup>5</sup> but as James McNeill Whistler said, "It's the pain of giving birth!" But is it worse than preparing on an as-needed basis and risk falling "to your death" at every obstacle?

Don't rely on mere luck to bail you out. Prepare like a grandmaster marksman or the greatest jazz musicians. Work smarter. Woodshed. If you do, you can react instantaneously to crisis opportunities with gusto. And you'll be able to keep up with the fast tempo of business and easily adapt to the quickly moving harmony or landscape.