



## Coaching

Coaching is the process of actively observing a shooter during the firing process to look for shooting errors that the firer themselves may not consciously know they are making. Marksmanship requires the consistent and proper application of the elements of employment. It is about doing the right thing, the same way, every shot. The small arms trainer is also the validation point for any questions during employment training. In most cases, once group training is completed, it will be the firer's responsibility to realize and correct his own firing errors but this process can be made easier through the use of a coach.

There are Experienced coaches and Peer coaches. Although each should execute coaching the same way, Experienced coaches have a more thorough understanding of employment, are more personally skilled, and have more knowledge and practice in firing than the shooters they are coaching. Knowledge and skill does not necessarily come with rank or MOS, therefore Experienced coaches must demonstrate a heightened level of ability and this almost always requires successfully shooting something more stringent than routine qualification along with a formal instructor background. Personnel serving as experienced coaches should be carefully selected for their demonstrated firing ability as many inexperienced personnel will proclaim ability and expertise they don't possess. Just as important is proven personal skill is the ability to convey information to firers of varying experience levels.

Experienced coaches are short supply throughout the Army as most personnel have never proven their skill beyond completing qualification. Even "expert" qualification results often fail to demonstrate gen-

uine expertise. This lack of experienced coaches usually leads to one experienced coach watching multiple firers dependent upon the table or period of employment being fired. It often helps the experienced coach to make notes of errors they observe in shooters and discuss them after firing that group. It is often difficult for the coach to remember the errors that they observe in each and every firer.

Peer coaching, although generally not as effective as using an experienced coach, is still a very useful technique. Peer coaches are Soldiers coaching each other. Observing others and having others observe them increases the experience level of everyone. Initial attempts at helping another shooter will likely result in bad advice, such as things repeated from Basic training and other introductory experience, but trying to talk another shooter through the process while observing the results creates a feedback loop. This also helps bring observations to an experience coach. The act of coaching and observing others may help learn from mistakes and learn what works. Many people grasp instruction more deeply when they are coaching others than when they are simply told to do something. Most Soldiers will be limited by their level of training, which is limited to elementary introduction as found in basic training.

However, except for aiming, the peer coach can observe most of the important aspects of the elements of employment. To determine the unobservable errors of shooting, the coach and the firer must have an open dialog and there must be a relaxed environment for learning. The firer cannot be hesitant to ask questions of the coach and the coach must not become a stressor during firing.

### Coaching Positions

The coach must have the ability to safely move around the firer to properly observe. There is no one ideal coaching position. The following will demonstrate the elements of shooting and how best to observe them as a coach.

For Stabilize, the coach observes how stable the shooter is by moving to different sides of the shooter. To observe the shooter's non-firing elbow (to ensure it makes contact with the ground), the coach will need to be on the shooter's non-firing side. To observe the cant of the weapon (the sights on the weapon should be pointing towards 12 o'clock position, not 11 or 1 o'clock positions), the coach will need to watch the relationship of the front sight to the barrel from behind the shooter. The coach should look for all the other aspects of good positions as outlined in chapter 6 of this publication. The coach should also observe the total amount of weapon movement on recoil. A good stable position will have minimal movement under recoil.

For Aiming, determine the aspects of the firer's aiming (sight picture, sight alignment, point of focus) with a dialogue between the firer and the coach. Often, a shooter will not realize his aiming errors until he discovers them on his own. The only method a coach has to observe aiming errors is to use of an M16 sighting device but this device can only be used on rifles with carrying handle sights. Without the use of a sighting device, the coach must rely on drawings, discussions, or the use of an aiming card to determine where the firer is aiming on the target, his focus point during firing (which should be the front sight), and where his front sight was at the moment of firing in relation to the rear sight aperture and the point of aim on the target. The technique of having



*Left: Experienced coaches man the line while a peer coaches are positioned with each shooter.*



*Above: Coaches watch shooters as they shoot, not the target.*

the firer call his shots should also be used. This technique involves calling the point on the target where the sights were located at the moment of firing and matching the point called with the impact locations on the target. Calling the shot helps the firer learn to focus on the front sight during the entire firing process. When optics are being used, the shooter can tell the coach where he was holding. This is of particular importance with the RCO. Coaches must insure the 300m aim point is used when zeroing at 25-m.

For Control, the ideal position to observe trigger control is from the non-firing side because the coach



will have a better view of the speed of pull, finger position on the trigger, and release or pressure on the trigger after firing. The coach can look from behind the shooter to observe the barrel for lateral movement caused by slapping the trigger during firing.

**Coaching Factors**

All firing happens at the weapon. This means that the coach should be focused solely on the shooter during firing and not on what is happening down range. Do NOT look down-range.

There is no way for a coach to observe only the bullets impact on target and know what errors the firer made. The coach must watch the shooter during firing to determine errors and use the impacts to confirm their assumptions.

For a coach to properly observe all aspects of firing they must be able to observe the shooter, safely, from both sides and the back. There is no prescribed coaching position.

Coaching requires a relaxed atmosphere with open communication between the firer and the coach.

Finally, shooting errors are almost never caused by breathing, especially during zeroing and other slow fire shooting. Only an unskilled shooter and a poor coach insists this is a likely problem. Those proclaiming to “watch your breathing” should be excused from coaching as unskilled and assigned a detail away from the firing line so as to not contaminate the shooters with their faulty, unskilled assessments.

**Shot Group Analysis**

Shot group analysis involves the firer correlating the shots on paper with the mental image of how the shots

*Left: The coach observes the target with optics instead of stopping the line to go down range.*

looked when fired. An accurate analysis of the shot group cannot be made by merely looking at the holes in the paper. It is more important to observe the firer while they’re shooting than to try and analyze the target. All firing takes place at the weapon. The holes in the paper are only an indicator of where the barrel was pointed when the rifle was fired. When coaches are analyzing groups, they must question the firer about the group to make a determination of what caused the placement of the shots.

Observing the shooter must be accomplished before analyzing the target can become effective. Bullets strung vertically almost is never due to a breathing issue, nor do bullets strung horizontally absolutely indicate a trigger squeeze problem. Coaches must learn to identify shooter errors during firing and use the bullet’s impacts on target to confirm their observations.

There are often several firing errors that can be the cause of certain misplaced shots. The key to good coaching is becoming a shooting DETECTIVE. The coach needs to observe the shooter, question the shooter, look at the evidence down range, question the shooter again, make assumptions based upon the evidence available, and then act upon the evidence. Coach and shooter must have a free and open dialog with each other in a relaxed atmosphere.

If a Soldier learns to shoot poorly they will only be capable of shooting poorly. **USARCMC**

*Left: Coach and shooter can talk and practice as the range remains hot without stopping anyone else.*

