

Teaching or Coaching?

Some people teach archery and some coach; there is a difference. I was recently watching a “coach” work with a student and after a few minutes it dawned on me that he was not coaching but teaching. Oops, my foot went through the soap box I was about to climb up on.

I watched as a student was told to take ten shots and place them all in the gold while the “coach” walked outside to smoke a cigarette. He later came back in and was obviously upset with the shots. I couldn’t believe my ears when I heard him say “If you can hit one ten, you can do it every time; you just ain’t trying hard enough.” What a novel coaching philosophy. I wanted to ask if he was really a coach, but I was afraid I’d hear, “No, but I slept in a Holiday Inn Express last night.”

Anybody with some hands-on experience can teach. How hard can it be? “Put the arrow on the string, pull it back, point it at the target, and let go. That’ll be 25 dollars please.” It’s kinda like paying some guy who just watched an instructional video to take out your appendix.

I’ve watched these “coaches” come and go. They usually have some experience on the range, won a shoot or two (locally), do fairly well and decide to coach for a little extra cash and some recognition. They get a few students together and within a month or two, their students lose interest. Usually with the excuse of not having enough time. Oh yeah, they also brag a lot about their own equipment and push their students to buy more and more and more.

On the other hand, there are plenty of people out there just teaching and doing a great job at it. They enjoy the sport so much that they just want to help someone else feel what they feel. They don’t call themselves coaches, and to their credit, they aren’t charging for their advice. They are just spreading the joys of archery. I’ve picked up many good tips from these types of archers and am very thankful of their existence and willingness to help.

Charging . . . oops, the C word. . . . Before you

get all twisted up, I’m not saying someone shouldn’t charge for their time. I’m just implying that if you are going to charge, at least be worth it. Most coaches I know have spent a ton of time and money to learn their craft. They have gone to schools, taken classes, earned the right to be called a coach, and have the desire and the capability to help someone else succeed.

Coaches are constantly learning and growing. They know they have to stay current in everything concerned with their sport. When was the last time you saw someone teaching archery tell their student that they need to warm up with a few exercises before starting shooting and explain why? Ever see a teacher use an arrow plotting chart? I’d be willing to bet if you asked what his students’ average score was he’d tell you his last score.

Coaching is so much more than just teaching a skill. It’s explaining the correct way to execute that skill, the proper movements, the breathing techniques, and the mental aspects; not just providing you with the ability to know you made a mistake, but the ability to know why you made that mistake. A coach knows that there will be mistakes and helps you through them.

Getting back to my example, I overheard the comment, “If you want to win you’re going to have to get better than you are now.” Well, duh! That’s fortune cookie material for sure. A good coach understands that his students can’t shoot any better in a tournament than they did in their last few practice

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Coaching Archery

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averages. Expecting more than that is just unrealistic. There are times I stand and bite my tongue, wanting to intrude, but knowing better.

I sometimes work with groups that just want to have some fun for an hour or so. I consider this teaching. I get them on the range and shooting as quickly as possible, have some fun, and send them on their way. I get to introduce them to the art and they get to shoot. That’s what they came for. If I made a good impression, they’ll be back and then the coaching begins.

One thing I’ve noticed most often is that someone teaching tends to be a bit commanding. Do this, do that, this way. This is the way I do it and it will work for you. All they’re doing is passing on information. It’s like a real teacher telling a class full of students to read chapter one and tomorrow there will be a test. It’s up to you to figure out what you need.

Good coaches listen. They learn to read body language and understand that silences are just another way of communicating. They work closely with the parents as well as the child. Their attention is always with their student. A coach knows that working with an adult is greatly different from working with a child. I have seen archery teachers working with children completely ignore them for minutes on end when an adult comes into the room asking for advice. Unfortunately, the student gets a little better over time just from shooting rather than from being coached and doesn’t realize he is being cheated.

I was practicing at the range recently and a guy was there shooting quietly. He didn’t really say much but was intent on shooting a three-spot target. I watched as he desperately tried to put an arrow in each spot, his frustration building. I couldn’t help myself, I butted in. It’s my nature, it’s what I do.

I asked how long he had been shooting and he told me only a few weeks. I asked why the three-spot and he told me because his coach told him to shoot it. The reason was to keep from shooting his own arrows due to the accuracy of the compound he was using. (I’m not crazy, I wrote down the name of the bow . . . it comes with its own accuracy built in. I have got to get one.) He admitted he was having a real problem focusing on the target. After talking a bit more he told me that he had bought the bow mainly for recreation and had no interest in hunting.

There were some 60 cm multi-colored targets on the target butts left over from JOAD class and I suggested he shoot one of them. After several minutes he began to keep his groups in the red. His attitude changed. He even had quite a

few in the gold. I shot a little, packed my gear and left. Several weeks later I ran into the same guy at the range and he couldn’t wait to tell me how his shooting had progressed. He was hooked. He even had a new sight ordered.

He had told his “coach” that he no longer wanted to shoot the three-spot and had decided to concentrate on the multi-colored targets as a way

to strengthen his focus skills. He told me his “coach” was disappointed and couldn’t help him if he didn’t want to take his advice. He thanked me for my advice from that night at the range and wanted to know if he could pay me for my coaching. I explained that at that particular time I wasn’t coaching, I was teaching, and he owed me nothing.

He asked me the difference and I explained. “I taught you the difference between a three-spot and a single spot. I taught you the difference between enjoyment and frustration. I taught you that you don’t have to limit yourself to one style. I taught you that I understood what you were going through even if you didn’t. I taught you the difference between teaching and coaching. Now that you know the difference, the real coaching can begin.”

Tim Scronce and his wife **Sandi** are both NAA Level 3 Coaches. Tim has been involved in archery since around the age of seven. He shoots compound, recurve, and occasionally longbow. He competes regularly, when time permits. Sandi and Tim teach and certify Level 1 and Level 2 instructors, work with Girl and Boy Scouts thru archery, coach in a JOAD program, and have a range at home to teach privately.

In the past three years, they have used archery to raise money for the American Cancer Society, the Union County Lions Club and the Sun Valley Community Fair supporting five schools in the area. Tim does commercial heating and air conditioning. They have two children (Crystal and TJ) who both shoot recurve and compete as well. They are proud to add that Crystal spent two years working on getting an archery club going in her high school which became a reality in February 2002. She now attends North Carolina State where she plans to help reinstate the college’s archery team.

