

Are You Losing Interest in Archery?

Special Feature

As we practice archery, we all progress at various rates. At some times we improve rapidly and at other times, we seem to be getting worse each time we shoot.

When we first started shooting, we really enjoyed it and seemed to progress rapidly in being able to get more and more arrows in the red and gold. It was a game and we were like children. You'd note your score or how many arrows hit the gold and then try really hard to either match it or, preferably, beat it. It was fun and you loved it. You'd lose all sense of time. How many times have you told someone, "I'll only be half an hour" and then turned up two or three hours later? If you missed a shot or didn't do as well with one arrow as you did with the last, you'd tell yourself, "Oh heck," "Damn it," or something along those lines with an unconcerned voice and when you came away, you'd tell yourself that you did 'pretty well' or 'fairly well' or 'alright' or 'really well this time' and look forward to going again next time.

Somewhere along the road, though, it all changed. It seemed that the longer you had been shooting, the less you seemed to improve. You bought better, more expensive equipment and bought instructional books. You poured over the Internet or through magazines searching for tips and hints to improve your technique. You consis-

tently checked each and every part of your technique and form as you constantly strove to accurately replicate each and every movement in your shot. The most annoying thing was when you shot three or four arrows accurately and consistently and started to feel good and then the next two or three were all over the target. You became more and more frustrated and your internal dialogue changed to more 'colourful' language as well. Your tonality changed from indifference and gentle chiding to exasperation and frustration. It seemed as if the harder you tried, the worse it became. You saw that others were improving at a faster rate than you felt you were. Before, nothing would stop you from going shooting, you began missing sessions or your practice sessions got shorter and shorter. Your internal dialogue was getting more severe and abrupt and you were beginning to think that maybe 'it's not for you.' What changed? What happened? How come something that was so much fun and so easy became so hard and frustrating?

At some point it all got very *serious*. Where at first, you'd go shooting and be laughing and joking as you shot and encouraging fellow club members who were shooting on the same target as you, now you're secretly competing with them, silently whooping with joy as their arrows hit the

blue or black as yours hit the red or gold and hoping that they'd even miss altogether.

We do need to take some things very seriously, as some things are serious and that it's part of the very seriousness that makes them work safely and smoothly. We can't be talking to people as they shoot - the consequences could be disastrous.

“At some point it all got very serious.”

Remember though, that there are times to be serious and times to lighten up. Often the harder you try to do something, the harder it becomes. I once worked with a woman who had 'forgotten' how to swim and the harder she tried, the quicker she sank to the bottom of the pool. Her problem was that she was simply trying too hard.

When you learnt to walk or talk, it happened almost without thinking. You were rewarded for doing it right and encouraged to do it again if you did it wrong. We made up games and jokes and learnt through experience, but most of all, it was fun!

We, as human beings, learn from physical experience and especially when we enjoy something. That is what we are often missing from our trainings-fun. Somewhere along the line, we started to take it all too seriously. Archery and especially competitive archery is serious but not too serious. Look for ways that you can really enjoy your training. Shoot at larger or smaller targets, balloons, dartboard target faces, even photos of people who you don't like, anything that makes you laugh when you do it and that makes it fun and enjoyable. A psychiatrist would probably watch you shooting at pictures of people who you don't like and think, "Hmm. I could spend a lot of time working with this person as they obviously need a lot of help," but, what the heck, whatever works, works.

“The best archers don't take it seriously all the time. They have ways of consistently enjoying the whole process of training and shooting”

The best archers don't take it seriously all the time. They have ways of consistently enjoying the whole process of training and shooting. They laugh and chat between shooting rounds, they laugh and enjoy shooting



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when they are accurate and even when they aren't.

We learn best while we are laughing and having fun. When you can learn to laugh at what was perceived as a problem, it ceases to be a problem. Look at your training and ask yourself, "How can I make it more fun, interesting, and enjoyable?" If your club doesn't appreciate your using different target faces of your own choosing, go to the range earlier than the others or stay later, shoot by yourself first thing in the morning when you're going to be the only one there. Do whatever it takes to make your shooting fun!

The very word 'training' makes it all sound so very serious. The word 'shooting' or 'archery' makes it sound much more relaxed. Which do you say? "I'm going training" or "I'm going shooting" or "I'm going to archery"?

Try this to recover the joys of archery: find somewhere quiet where you can sit or lie undisturbed for a while. Think of something that you do because you love it, something that you really enjoy and find it very, very pleasurable, something that you don't take too seriously

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but you'd never pass up an opportunity to do it. Does anything come to mind? Now, look at the qualities of that image or movie that just ran through your mind. Where is it in your mind's eye? Straight in front, down to the left or the right or upwards? Wherever it is, just take note of it. Is it in colour or black and white? Note the vividness of the colours. Is there movement in what you see? Notice the size of it. Do you see yourself in the pictures or are you seeing what you'd see if you were seeing it through your own eyes? Take note of the brightness and the distance of the pictures in front of you. If you're

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not sure yet, then trust your intuition and go along with the answers you feel are correct to these questions. Is there any sound? Any internal talking? If so, take note of where it comes from, how it sounds - tonality, tempo, etc and lastly, are there any feelings within your body that lets you know that this experience is really enjoyable? Take note of any that you feel and notice how strong they are and where you feel them within your body.

Now think about your archery and let an image or movie come to mind. When you have one, note that it will probably be in a different place, with somewhat different qualities to the 'really love it' one. Now take the picture or movie of your archery and move it to the position of the one of what you really love and begin to change the qualities of 'archery' to those of what you 'really love to do' - the same position, closeness, colours, brightness, focus, distance in front of you, size, etc. If the 'archery' thought was a photo and the 'really love it' one was a movie, make the 'archery' thought into a movie and give it movement. Change the sounds, the internal dialogue and the feelings to those of the 'really love it' thought. Continue to do this until you see, hear and feel the 'archery' representation in exactly the same way as the 'really love it' representation. For some people this will be

easy while for others it will necessitate a bit of effort.

Now, see the two images in your minds eye again and repeat the transfer of the archery representation into the representation of the thing you really love. Do this again and again about ten times and do it faster each time you do.

When you do it fully and accurately, you will attach the feelings of what you really love to do to archery practice. Combine this with the question “How can I make it even more fun and more enjoyable still?” and then just do it, *e.g.* shoot at pictures of X , or shoot at balloons or animal face targets.



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