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Lessons Learned From Archery: How to Focus and Hit the Bull's-eye in Life

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Lessons Learned From Archery: How to Focus and Hit the Bull's-eye in Life

By Bob Porter

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My grandfather started teaching me how to use a bow and arrow when I was about 6 years old. He taught me using a longbow made out of yew, which is a very specific type of wood used to make these bows.

Longbows are the type of bow that Robin Hood used, and they were made from long fairly straight pieces of wood along with a bow string that was organic and waxed. A longbow is unlike today's modern bows, in that there are no pulleys or curved arms to aid the archer when you pull the arrow back and help you hold it until you are ready to release the arrow.

Bows are measured in pounds, so the amount of force you use to pull the string back is the same force as what is applied to launch the arrow. For example, a 50-pound bow requires 50 pounds of force to fully pull the string back. Imagine trying to hold a 50-pound weight steady that is attached to the middle of a rope that is stretched tightly between your two outstretched hands. That is what using a 50-pound bow feels like.

The bow my grandfather used to teach me with was as tall as I was. Here I was, at 6 years old, holding that heavy weight between my outstretched hands. Shooting my first arrow felt like I was not only trying to hold that weight up, but that I was trying to also thread a needle with one of my hands at the same time. That's how it felt.

I have continued to use a bow and arrow through my adult life, and I have learned several lessons from archery that have helped me in life and business. The theme that carries through all of these lessons is "focus."

I have learned from archery to clearly see the target I want the arrow to hit, as well as the external factors that could affect hitting the target. External factors such as wind,

distance and any movement of the target typically reduce my odds of hitting the target. In order to hit it, not only must you first clearly identify the target (goal), but you must also consider all the external factors that will affect your efforts and adjust accordingly.

Archery has taught me to be aware of my own readiness to release the arrow. One key to this is my breathing. Another key is to be consistent with the draw of the string, where I pull it back to, and how I release it. Tiny changes at the bow typically make big differences in the flight of the arrow and where the arrow lands. In life and business, you must ensure that not only all of the external factors have been taken into account, but also that you have taken an internal inventory and that you are ready to make your shot.

Archery has also helped me ensure that I can concentrate under stress to clearly keep my target in focus. This takes patience and perseverance. When I first looked down the length of an arrow at a target 100 feet away and attempted to keep the tip of the arrow pointed at the bull's-eye, I felt very confident. But I was just holding the arrow in my hand – it was not on the bow. The tip of the arrow seemed to do anything but point at the bull's-eye when I had it on the bow and under tension. Aiming at your target under stress is much harder than doing it under ideal conditions. Through practice it becomes more natural.

Finally, archery has taught me when to release the arrow. What good is improved focus if you don't take the shot? When you have an arrow on the string, fully pulled into position and pointed toward the target, you must shoot when you have the shot. And often, the tip will wander and move on and off of the bull's-eye while it is in flight. But that shouldn't stop you. In order to be able to hit the bull's-eye, I had to practice. Over time, that gave me the confidence to take more and more shots. I learned to trust my skills and senses.

OK, I'm not Robin Hood, and you probably aren't either. So what is the translated value of learning about archery to everyday life? In a word: focus. And in two words: improved focus.

Ultimately, everything I've learned in archery is all related to specific ways to help me improve my mental focus. Using a bow and arrow requires patience to ensure that you have the target in sight. You must identify your main target, understand important external factors, ensure you are internally ready, and ultimately take the shot.

I am often inspired by a memory from my last trip to Japan when I had the opportunity to witness a display of great skill regarding archery: a Ninja riding on a horse and shooting at a moving target with his bow and arrow, an extremely difficult feat.

Like the Ninja, maintaining your focus on moving targets these days can be hard. There are ever-increasing demands on our attention and our time, and there always seem to be so many distractions from the truly important things to in life.

To me, maintaining my focus means paying attention to my tasks, priorities and values in order to hit the important goals that truly make a difference. That is why I kept my grandfather's bow as a reminder of the lessons he taught me about focus.

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