

DEVELOPING YOUR SHOT SEQUENCE MODEL

Last time I wrote about developing your own physical shot sequence list. How many elements did you start with and how many did you end up with? The list always seems to get longer! But this is brilliant because it shows that your understanding of your archery is also developing and this can only be of benefit to your performance and enjoyment.

In this article, we are going to look at how to further develop your physical shot sequence. If you have listed your ideas to date on computer, turn the page from portrait to landscape and divide it into 3 columns.

Column 1 is the physical list you have already produced. I would like you to go through the elements of your shot and underline the pivotal moments, e.g. in the phase of nocking an arrow, you could underline pushing the nock onto the string. In the draw phase you might underline 'reach reference'.

We are now going to work on column 2.

Look at the first element underlined in column 1 and note in column 2 the feedback you rely on which lets you know you have achieved that element successfully. What feedback have you got? With the arrow nock your feedback might be hearing the 'click'. With the 'reach reference' you may be aware that you can feel the position of your hand against a specific point on your face. Both of these comments are dependent upon you recognising what feedback your body is able to register.

Some archers 'feel' feedback more easily than others. We have the five main senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Research has identified that we may rely up to 80% on sight to assess the world around us. That's fine if we just want to move around safely, but if we want to accurately repeat a specific movement in a subtly changing environment and have 'real time' assurance that we have done this as successfully as possible, our eyes are no longer wholly effective. Because many of us have relied on using our eyes as our main source of sensory input, we have often become careless about the regular use of our other senses and our ability to 'read' their feedback may need some focused practice.

But what other senses are of use, what 'feelings' should we be aware of? Yes, we can hear the 'click' when we nock an arrow or when the clicker goes off, but can we hear what our back is doing? This is where our Somatic senses play their

part. This is the sense of our proprioception, our movement and position in space. Try shutting your eyes and then moving your hand up to your mouth. Success? Well, you have been practicing this manoeuvre ever since you started feeding yourself and as we identified in the first article, the regular use of a specific process improves our ability to successfully and accurately repeat that process.

So, the process of using and tuning in to our somatic senses will enhance our ability to 'read' how we move through and operate within our environment and begin to develop a multi-layered perception of how our bodies move. It will also provide a deeper understanding of the feedback we expect to experience when performing each movement within our shot sequence. Our reading and assessment of somatic feedback will allow the performance of each element of our shot to become more consistent and reliable and it will be less likely to break down under stress.

So, once you are aware that we each have the basic ability to assess all this, how do you develop that ability? This involves 'blind bale' shooting and lots of focused hard work! Blind bale shooting crudely removes the dominant input of sight and gives us the opportunity to enhance our perception of alternative input. Now you know that you have the ability to 'feel' what is happening in your body when you shoot, grab a stretchy band, shut your eyes and turn up the volume on your other senses. Run through the shot sequence you have written in column 1 as a result of the last article and jot down what you feel at pivotal points. The sensations felt, words and descriptions used, are all unique to you. Nothing is right or wrong, it is what *you* can sense. Continue with this work over a period of time, being wholly aware of what feedback your body is giving you. Listen carefully to what your body is telling you and note it all down. The feedback may change as your ability to read it develops, so keep altering the contents of column 2 until it accurately reflects your current ability to identify some useful physical feedback.

Once you have a fairly consistent feedback response listed, read through your shot sequence and link one particular physical movement with the feedback comment you have made. Pick up your stretchy band and with your eyes open, shoot your shot making a focused effort to keep your awareness on your feedback, making sure that the expected feedback is sensed at the pivotal moment selected. Once this is achieved, choose another moment within the physical performance and link with the specific feedback you expect. Check that

you are still achieving this in the shot with your eyes open. Maintain your conscious effort within your form and your feedback. Just because your eyes are open should not mean that your consciousness should have strayed beyond your body holding the stretchy band.

Once you have achieved this, and if you have the facilities, go to a safe short boss and do the same process with your bow and your eyes open. **MAINTAIN YOUR CONCIUSNESS WITHIN YOUR FORM AND YOUR FEEDBACK.** Over time, extend the distance over which you make the shot, making sure that your somatic senses remain the dominant feedback source. Do not allow the dominance of sight to re-establish itself. If you are not lucky enough to have the facilities to actually shoot at this point, do not despair! You are developing internal systems which will underpin your understanding of your shot and your actual performance once you are able to shoot with a bow once more.

As I suggested at the beginning of this article, a shot sequence and one's awareness and perception of the processes involved, continually develops. In doing so, it allows for a deeper understanding of the individual elements of your shot and helps underpin a consistency which not only promotes a greater satisfaction in the execution of the process in itself, but also develops an improvement in accuracy of the result. It will also provide an acute awareness of the elements which need most work and help drive further exploration and development of one's technique.

Next time, column 3, which provides the 'fine tuning' or personalised element of your shot sequence.