



The Female Factor

By Katie Haymes

Outfitting a Hunter

As I sat down to write this final column for you, I wanted to write about a topic that I am passionate about but would also leave you with additional opportunities to make a difference in not only the archery community but also conservation as a whole. In previous columns, I have written about how to welcome people into your shop, how to make them feel comfortable, how to speak their language, amenities to have on site and partnerships. Each of these topics was geared toward “new customers” or “new archers.” By default, that means many of those new archers purchased equipment or lessons from you and learned how to shoot. What if their end goal was to bowhunt, though? Outfitting a new bowhunter goes beyond the bow and hitting the target.

You might be thinking, *Well, before someone becomes a hunter, they have to have equipment and know how to hit their target and that is where the dealer comes in.* That is true but those same services are provided for target archers as well and they are dealing with a completely different style and sport of archery. If an archer wants to advance in either, they will likely need help learning the ropes through additional opportunities. There are many classes offered for “learning archery” these days. Many are provided at archery shops and, in addition, clubs like JOAD and Adult Archery that support an archer’s journey to learn are often available. Just like the target archery side, hunting requires a skill set beyond being able to release your arrow and if someone coming to your shop is brand-new to archery, it is likely they are newbies to this necessary set of skills too. Are any classes offered to support those new archers hoping to bowhunt? Think about it. If you offer “Archery 101” classes, do you offer



To a new hunter, one place may look just as good as the next to set up for a hunt. However, to an experienced hunter, topography, plants, trees and other features greatly influence where they choose to hunt. Learning the basics of animal movement through terrain, such as what elevation elk use in September versus November and the use of landscape features such as saddles, can be key to a new hunter’s success.

any “Learn to Hunt” or “Hunting 101” classes?

A report recently released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicated a record number of Americans participating in outdoor and wildlife-related activities but a decline in hunters is still being seen. The last news I recall hearing about the industry was that recreational equipment purchases were on the increase, which falls right in line with what the USFWS report is suggesting. If I am not mistaken, many archery shops were started by bowhunters for bowhunters and though it makes sense to take advantage of a growing archery segment such as recreational archers, it might make just as much sense to grow the segment that got you into the business to begin with: bowhunters. If a decline in hunters continues, thus cutting into business from bowhunters, the future might look pretty dreary for some.

Is it actually realistic for a dealer to create new bowhunters? No: dealers typically cannot offer the amount of time, support and education that is required to build a new bowhunter on their own. New hunters need a mentor-like person or group of people to support their hunting goals over a long period of time. However, now more than ever, there are numerous opportunities for dealers to support an archer’s path to bowhunting.

Over the past five-plus years, the hunting community (conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, the industry, passionate hunters and more) has begun to work together, utilizing a common strategy toward the



In addition to making sure they are proficient with their bow, a hunter should also be able to identify various wildlife signs, like this elk wallow, to increase their chance for success. New hunters may get easily discouraged if they simply go out with their equipment with no direction or knowledge of scouting techniques.

recruitment of hunters. The effort is referred to as “R3” (Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation). Through various program evaluations and recruitment studies, it was found that learning how to shoot is just the beginning and only a small piece of the hunting puzzle. In most cases, simply introducing someone to shooting isn’t enough to get them hunting and that makes perfect sense if you think about your last day afield.

The last time I sat in a deer stand, I spent 99.9 percent of the hunt not shooting my bow. I had done a lot of preparation prior to the hunt, which included practicing with my bow and I was fortunate to have a lot of butchering work to do after the hunt. Hunting requires not only physical equipment like your bow, treestand, calls, trail cameras, clothing, blinds, and field dressing knives but a mental toolbox as well. That toolbox is filled with knowledge of the game animal being hunted, how and when to use various equipment, how weather affects a hunt, what time of day you hunt, regulations and so much more. If I didn’t have someone teaching me about all of that, I would be oblivious to much of what is needed to be successful afield.

As a dealer, how can you help archers start piecing their bowhunting skill sets and mental toolboxes together?

Offer additional information. This information can come in a variety of forms but the key is to offer it. Did you just set up a first bow for someone and find out this is their first season going afield? Maybe have a packet of information to give them that includes state regulations, a list of hunting clubs and conservation organizations in the area or any upcoming “Hunting 101” type classes. Simply putting the information and contacts in their hands can give them the encouragement to reach out to these groups for more information. Yes, as experienced hunters, we know these groups exist but do new hunters? The information packet might also include hunting tips for whatever the upcoming season is or a few things a hunter could do to prepare during the off season. Essentially, you are trying to help give these new hunters a head start in what direction to look for further information.

Do you already host a number of archery classes? Maybe the additional information you offer comes in the form of a “Hunting 101” class you host. There are a variety of curricula, from the ATA’s “Explore Bowhunting and Explore Bowfishing” to QDMA’s “QDMA in the Classroom” and the NWTf’s “Turkey Hunting Safety & Success,” each of which offers ready-to-teach lessons that can be easily utilized for a Hunting 101 class.

Get involved with R3. As I briefly touched on before, R3 is a collaborative effort between numerous outdoor and conservation organizations. The Council to Advanced Hunting and Shooting Sports (CAHSS) and the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) have been working with individual states to get dedicated staff in place that organize the effort at a state level. Meetings are held at least annually by state Fish and Wildlife agencies for all R3 partners. That includes you as a part of the industry. At these meetings, programs and organizations’ roles are discussed. Plans are made that have the greatest potential to support new hunter development without duplicating efforts, as we have seen happen in the past. I urge you to contact your state R3 coordinator and participate



New hunters need a network of support to encourage and guide them to success in the field. At the infancy of their hunting journey, new hunters are more likely to go afield if someone else goes with them. Providing opportunities for them to team up with other hunters supports their hunting journey and encourages them to keep trying.

so you are aware of what is available to new hunters and can steer them to the next step of their hunting journey. You might also find that you get a few referrals for equipment purchases from R3 programs as a supporter of the effort.

Create a shop network. Through the various hunting programs I have taught, I have found that new hunters feel more confident going afield with someone else. This does not mean the other person has to be an experienced hunter; they may simply be there to make a new adventure seem a little less intimidating. If you aren’t able to be the support system for all of your new bowhunters – I am going to take a wild guess that you are not – help create that support network through other new hunters or customers at your shop. This could be as simple as hosting a new hunters’ night to kick off the deer season and allowing those customers to mingle, buy product, get excited about their first season out and become acquainted with each other. Encouraging the exchange of contact information with others to hunt with down the road would be good too. You could also offer a block of time each month for new hunters to come in and learn about a specific topic. You can advertise the event to shop customers or through local clubs/organizations and invite experienced hunters to attend to help field questions and share their knowledge. Offering simple “extras” for new hunters in your shop like these two examples will really help them feel supported and also win you more business.

In short, let’s not forget that bowhunters were the foundation of our industry. With hunting’s continual decline in participation, it is time to find your essential role in the effort to grow our beloved sport for hunting, conservation and your business’ long-term success.

Editor’s Note: Katie Haymes has a degree in wildlife science and worked for four years for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife. She was the education programs manager at the Archery Trade Association before leaving that position to spend more time with her young daughter and her husband. The Haymes family lives in Virginia. ←