

GOLF LEARNING SESSIONS – WHAT THEY ARE, WHAT THEY ARE NOT

How should students rank golf instructors? If you are currently taking or are considering golf lessons, do you think you should ultimately rank your professional based on short-term or long-term results? The paradox, of course, is that if you experience a level of short-term difficulties as you amend your learning beliefs, it could shed a dark shadow on your perception of our teaching approaches. Try as we might, we can't see your future or potential. Can you see the predicament? We want you to get better, but in how short a time frame depends on each individual. With some we see near immediate changes perhaps due to a greater measure of athleticism which will speed up the process. With others, there may be a complex matrix of errors each trying to "cancel out" the other with the hopes of seeing some positive results; this extends the development timeframe.

Is your golf pro responsible for your success as a player? Should he/she take credit for your good rounds and blame for the poor? The answer to both questions is no because once the lesson time is ended, it is up to each individual as to how they will use the information received. Are you going to do all drills as prescribed? Are you willing to do some prescribed "mirror work" at home between lessons? If given a training aid to use before the next lesson, are you going to actually use it? How about studying sent reading materials? How about using a temporary practice jingle for your next ___ number of practice sessions to "install" one positive area at a time? Or are you in too big of a hurry?

If you are a golfer who has a series of compensating errors in your set-up and/or swing which developed because of a desire for immediate gratification or immediate change to your previous shot, you cannot and should not expect to see long-term development or consistency – your choice. Continuing with compensations, the "trial and error" approach to your practice sessions, is another way of saying that you are content with a level below your potential.

If you have a desire to see how far you can take this game, you MUST consider taking lessons. PGA Professionals are not "smarter" than amateurs, we've simply learned the RELATIVE and long-term requirements needed to reach one's potential. We have studied cause and effect and most importantly the BALL FLIGHT LAWS. The 'good ones' never guess or doubt the message... we simply are the messengers of the laws! You crave consistency? How about becoming aware of natural physical laws which haven't changed since the beginning of time!

If you are dedicated to amending your belief system, immediate progress WILL be seen. If you "fight" the laws, you will remain in "no man's land" halfway between your old style and beliefs and the new, experiencing less on-course performance than before and may have the urge to transfer blame to your instructor. Obviously, we cannot force you to do anything, but today can be a new day and a new beginning. If you do, the rewards are great!

Many clients may come to a golf lesson expecting to be "told" what to do. For instance, you may be struggling with chipping, and think that the professional should just tell you what you are doing wrong, and how to do it right. You might come into the lesson thinking that you don't really want to know the root cause of why something is happening. However, learning research disagrees which this approach. We (that means all human beings) desire an understanding of the reason why we are being asked to modify our behavior. For example, perhaps following a full-swing lesson you experience some of the poorest on-course shots you have ever seen from yourself. This phenomenon is NOT necessarily due to the pro being "wrong" or that he/she presented the wrong

message, it's because without understanding you, and being OK with just being "told what to do differently" you did not PERSONALIZE IT!

An experienced instructor knows that changes without understanding are very short lived. You may be able to execute better looking chips shots by the end of a "what-to-do" lesson, (and think the pro is amazing), but what happens when the poor results reappear the next day or week and you have no "plan B?" I personally do not try to impress you, or particularly care about what you "thought" your lesson was going to be like and I have lost some non-committed students along the way; but that's alright, my conscious is clear. But if you think about it, didn't you really choose to a new approach because you needed to hear and think about your swing or short shots DIFFERENTLY anyway? The professional's style, explanations and demonstrations should be a surprise to you. One famous instructor once told me that my goal as an instructor is for my students to have as many "WOW MOMENTS" as possible; "gee pro I never thought of it that way!"

In my career I have been fortunate to learn to teach from some of the greatest golf minds in the world and through my own exhaustive research, I am very confident in my style and approach and charge accordingly. I am sure that some students do not return for future lessons because they did not hear me repeat what many other professionals, golf magazines and books suggested... and that's OK. The one's who do "push through" realize accelerated development at a level which they perhaps never thought possible, and they understand that my style is designed and proven to provide long-term and lasting improvement.

If your search for the "best" golf pro is based on the one who gives the best "tips" that "work", sadly your decision might already have been made. For the rest of you who realize that golf is a game of a lifetime, you should choose your personal golf instructor because you intend to trust their experience and what he/she has discovered to be the best and most long-lasting way for you to improve... and it may not be what you had expected! DO NOT panic or believe that you are getting too much information, remember, the professional may have only a few hours of your time, you have the rest of your golfing life to "digest" them at your own pace! DO NOT fear knowledge presented in a way which may at first seem unfamiliar to you; relish it and take it as a challenge.

Maybe it would be valuable for you as a student to go "behind the scenes" and into the mind of your PGA Professional as you arrive at your lesson. You should think of your lessons as a contract and a relationship between you and your instructor...a team! The following is a list with short explanations of what comprises a golf improvement program.

- Interview the student for goals. Are you looking for long-term (developmental) changes or short-term (corrective) changes.
- Observe current ball flights and evaluate reasons, causes and effects.
- Diagnosis of the root/primary cause of errors. Is it:
 - Student's mental concepts/beliefs. What is on your "supposed-to-do" list?
 - Student's physical concepts/beliefs. What is on your "supposed-to-do" list?
 - Student's pre-swing or set-up. Are you prepared for a correct swing or not?
 - Shape of swing in motion. The journey of the clubhead; its height, depth, width.
 - Sources of power in motion. Are you generating energy efficiently in the backswing?
 - Students muscular tension levels.
 - Student's timing. The order of movements is evaluated and explained.
 - Student's tempo. The pace at which the movements occur.
 - Student's equipment. Ill-fitted equipment will always cause compensations.

- Student's physical limitations. Injuries/surgeries/flexibility/strength all are evaluated so that you will only be asked to change what your body will allow.

UPDATE THE EFFICIENCY OF HABITS TO AFFECT BALL FLIGHT USING:

- "Image-rich" verbal suggestions.
- Visual learning through demonstrations of errors and their corrections.
- Visual aids, mirrors, video camera/playback, photos.
- Learning by "feel". Training/teaching aids and drills.
- Use of exaggeration to increase awareness of a change in a particular problem area.
- Repetition (myelination NOT "muscle memory")
- Positive mental encouragement and coaching
- Practice regiment given. Easy to follow, concise, efficient and narrowly focused.

Are you a high school, college or professional golf coach/instructor, or even a parent of an aspiring junior player? As "authority" to them, we represent the correct path towards a lifetime of golf enjoyment... but ONLY if that path is law-abiding and factual. Are you comfortable with that responsibility and challenge? If you are not fully employed in the business of golf, you may not have had the time to commit to the art and science to the degree of a PGA Professional. The following are some of my observations of golf coaching mistakes in my professional instruction career which began in 1985.

TEACHING GOLF FALLACIES - "keep your eye on the ball", "keep your head down", "you looked up" all these cliches and many more like them are hazardous to long-term golf health...yes HAZARDOUS! You may have been led to believe these fallacies because unfortunately they have been "drilled into" so many players for a long time. These worn-out golf cliches are used as convenient excuses for poor shots, but are not the long-term solution, are effects NOT causes, and should NEVER be condoned as fundamental by any source.

ASSUMING THEY UNDERSTAND THE "LINGO" - As a person or professional who is involved in the golf, you may have become "indoctrinated" into the terminology of golf that you assume everyone has the same definitions. DON'T assume this! Do you believe that when two medical doctors consult on a patient's condition that they speak the same "language" as when they explain it to the patient? In golf lingo, what does "fat" and "thin" mean to each individual, what about "open and closed" or "swing plane", etc. Don't assume anything.

TEACHING WHAT YOU DO IN YOUR SWING – A qualified PGA Professional is trained in the art of teaching golf which emphasizes the differences of each individual. Are your instructor's suggestions based on what they are "doing" in their own personal swing techniques? Could that be all they have an awareness of? Most likely, you are of a different age, have varying experiences, been exposed to more information (good or bad), have a different level of strength, flexibility and range of motion among many other possible differences. An old saying is "what is medicine for one may be poison to another"

GOOD AT THE SCIENCE, NOT AS GOOD AT THE ART – Since the advent of high technology, the internet, YouTube, etc., getting an understanding of the "science" of golf techniques has become "easy". In the past, golf instructors used to think we were so smart because we could use a credit card to buy a fancy swing analysis computer and learn to draw electronic lines and circles... but guess what, any first-grader can draw lines! The science has become easy to find, but to become an expert in golf instruction, it's the ART that separates us, the presentation of the science. The art of

lesson pace, body language, voice inflexion, CAUSE AND EFFECT understanding, proper information sequencing and more.

NOT TESTING/SCREENING FOR PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS – Trying to “mold” each player into a swing that assumes that the student has no physical limitations, injuries, surgeries etc. is perhaps the WORST teaching mistake. Attempting to ask someone to “do” something that their body is physically incapable of performing is a disservice and leads to frustration. Titleist Performance Institute (TPI) is a golf fitness certification which I personally have earned. Is your “coach” proficient or certified at screening each student for range of motion details and the correlations between the screening results and patterns of noticeable swing flaws and poor ball flight patterns?

I'M A GOOD PLAYER, SO I'M A GOOD TEACHER - If you were “attracted” to a certain golf instructor based on their playing record or you have seen their name in the newspaper after a tournament, is not taking in all required information about that instructor. Speaking for myself, I chose to give up my “playing career” to devote to others enjoying theirs more. I am not saying they can't co-exist, and that great players may also be a great instructor's, but is there enough hours in a day, days in a week, weeks in months, etc. to devote to both at the highest level possible? You should be searching for the professional who delivers the **CLEAREST MESSAGES** and those trained in that delivery.

TRIAL AND ERROR TIPS - Using a trial and error method is risky in that you stand the chance of changing positive skills which are already present. Trying to find the ‘needle in the haystack’ or short-term “tips” is no way to gain long-term understanding and consistency.

USING VIDEO/HIGH TECH AS YOUR PRIMARY GUIDE - We live in the electronic age, but my observation is that many teaching professionals rely on video systems too much. Learning how to operate a piece of technology **in no way qualifies anyone as a golf development specialist**. Like most disciplines, golf is a combination of art and science. Video helps with the science, but is **USELESS** to the student without the art of timing, cause and effect (what on the screen caused what?), lesson pace, other learning styles etc. Technology can become a negative teaching tool and should **NEVER** be your only resource/ guide.

USING DRILLS THE WRONG WAY - Drills are designed to isolate a specific swing flaw. They need to be administered for a specific individual and only used in an **exact way at an exact time in an exact amount**. So, just because you read about it in a reputable golf publication does not make it right for your development at this time.

DIAGNOSIS MISTAKES: Read and understand the following and see if you may need to change your current developmental philosophy:

- **Diagnosis without cause and effect understanding** - You may have become aware of two glaring mistakes in your swing, but can you differentiate which was the cause and which was the effect? Did that arm swing problem cause that body pivot problem or vice versa? If you try to “cure” both mistakes you are doing more work than needed (because one cure should cure the other) but if you pick the effect rather than the cause, your progress will be stalled if not stopped.
- **Diagnosis without differentiating conscious from the sub-conscious** – To some degree, all flaws remain in the sub-conscious until pointed out by another individual or external source like a video, but is your current golf instructor versed in distinguishing between them?

REPEATING OTHER TEACHERS SUGGESTIONS WITHOUT RESEARCH - Each professional instructor should have done, and have full confidence in their own research prior to charging fees for their services, and some may contradict the golf world's so called "experts". Is your current professional willing to trust their research even if the "experts" are trying to prove them wrong? One example, do you have all your players with small hands use an interlocking grip because Jack Nicklaus once wrote that this grip is for small hands? But how will you explain it to them when they discover that Tiger Woods who has large hands also uses an interlocking grip? And the big shock is that both Jack and Tiger both use the WRONG grip! You heard me, I said it...I would prove, explain and demonstrate why if I could get them together with me. Does your golf instructor have this much conviction? In other words, I don't suggest anything which I can't prove, explain and demonstrate.

I suppose each business manager has to decide whether to go with an old cliché "give the people what they want" or go the other way, taking the risk of losing clients to provide only what is NEEDED based on expertise and experience. Which serves the client best? I think it depends on the service/product, but as a professional golf instructor, I have CHOSEN to ask my clients to trust my expertise and research and "give the people what they need". I will explain to them that on the drive home, I am happy if they say to themselves "that was NOTHING like what I thought it was going to be like!" Conversely, I might rank a lesson as a failure if the client says "that's was just like what I thought it was going to be like." I aim to "surprise", "shock", and maybe even "disappoint and frustrate" you into considering breaking out of your old way of thinking and accepting a new learning approach. If you "hate" me now, but LOVE your game later, I've chosen to take that "hit." I do my best to keep my lessons lively and entertaining, but I am NOT an entertainer! I am paid to supply a "law-abiding" long-term practice and belief plan for each client, not provide "FALSE POSITIVES" which they would NEVER suspect is happening to them, and will keep them on the "search-try-fail-search again-try-fail..." loop forever!

Over the 35+ years I've been doing this, I have received a few emails from past clients with similar messages, but this one is a quote, "Greg, I took lessons with you many years ago and thought your message and approach was awful!, but I continued to practice using the notes you followed up with and have now exceeded my wildest golf beliefs in only a couple years... THANK YOU!"

Do the clients in your industry expect/demand IMMEDIATE gratification? Perhaps immediate profits, immediate satisfaction OR are they willing to forgo immediate gratification and pursue long-term gains? Each of my PGA Professional colleagues have to make this decision too. Giving the client what he/she wants might involve saying things they expected to hear, or even agreeing with their untrue beliefs even if deep down the professional knows that the clients style will "fall apart" and not survive the long-term.

In these cases, some percentage of clients never truly learn to distinguish a long-term style from short-term instant false positives and think I'm awful, that's OK... I'm willing to stick to proven learning theory, sleep well at night, knowing that I provided the BEST relative information that research and the truth can provide; no more, no less!

IT'S ALL ABOUT WHAT YOU DESERVE FROM YOUR INSTRUCTOR...

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