



**Proven
Strategies for
the Games Most
Frustrating
Challenges**

MIND HACKS
Simple Golf Strategies
for Winning Performance

Attitude

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Attitude...

Question: Transferring practice rounds to the course

Why is it such a struggle to take my practice sessions to the course? Golfers ask... “how come I can hit the ball so well on the range but have a difficult time replicating this on the golf course”, and “why can’t I putt on the golf course as well as I do on the putting green”?

When left on their own to try to figure this question out, many people look at their thinking or their behavior on the course for the source of the answer. Actually, the answer typically lies more in their practice behavior than it does in their playing behavior, and regularly includes a skewed perception of the results of practice shots. Let me explain.

✦ MIND HACK

Sure it helps to hit lots of golf balls on the range. Sure it helps to roll lots of putts on the putting green. Sure it helps to hit lots of bunker shots, pitch shots and chips.

In addition to hitting bucket after bucket of practice balls, what’s even more effective and productive is to approximate as much as possible the actual experience of playing the game when practicing the game.

Watching people’s typical practice involves seeing them hitting ball after ball on the range- frequently using the same club and hitting to the same target over and over and over again.

Watch on the putting green as many novices drop several balls, putt one, and rake another, and another, and another- all to the same hole. This is not real golf.

Granted, early in the development and integration of a swing change it is necessary to hit many shots simply to get the feel of the new swing. As well, if one is simply working on the mechanical “stroke” elements of putting, the above practice might be beneficial. However, once these changes have become more habitual, it is important that the practice protocols change as well.

With a full swing, this involves changing clubs with a high level of frequency and changing targets on every shot. As well, it is critical before hitting the ball that you have in mind a clear picture of the type of shot you want to hit and to have picked out a small, specific target.

This more closely resembles what you are attempting to do on the course. Hitting five, ten, or twenty drivers in a row does not resemble or reflect what you do on the course. Why then would you practice in this manner?

In addition, when one hits several of the same shots to the same target, there is a tendency to get forgetful about the result of each one of these shots. As an example, if you hit driver ten times in a row toward a flag on the range, you might have a tendency to remember the three or four that you bombed reasonably close to your intended target.

Along with this you might forget the three or four that were hit reasonably well, but were well off line- shots that would be in the rough or worse on the golf course. Of course, as a mental game consultant, I would want people to ultimately remember the shots they hit well and

“forget” the ones that they didn’t hit well. However, let’s be realistic when doing the comparative analysis between the range and the course.

It is possible that what you think is stellar shot making on the range is actually you employing selective memory about how well you really hit it on the range. Another possibility is that after you hit several drivers, the ninth or tenth one feels really good, and these are the ones to which you’re comparing your shots on the course.

Reality is that you don’t get the luxury of hitting ten drivers in a row on the course, and you may go a long time – even an hour or more between times that you use the same club twice.

Thus on the range, the more you change shots and clubs and targets, the more it will feel like the “real thing” to you. Similarly, on the putting green, it is important that a large portion of your practice be devoted to putting with one ball, with a full read and pre-putt routine, to varying holes.

If you miss, finish your putt. Again, this puts some “positive pressure” on you to make the putts, and replicates to the degree possible what you might encounter on the course. Otherwise, hitting several putts from the same place helps determine the speed and break of the putt, and gives some players a false sense of confidence or security that comes after determining this with several trials. No wonder it feels as though the putter works better in the practice area!

Change some of your practice habits to more closely resemble the tasks that you ask yourself to accomplish on the course, and you’ll see your game in a more honest light and see the time you spend in the practice area pay greater dividends!

Question: I sometimes lack confidence in myself and decision making on the course. How can I increase my confidence?

It is important to know what increases your confidence as well as knowing what negatively influences your confidence. This can help you take more control over this seemingly elusive characteristic.

★ MIND HACK

Players in golf regularly struggle with the elusive characteristic called confidence. For some, they had it and now have “lost it”. Others, claim never to have had it, and aren’t really sure what it is. Still more know what it is because they “see it in others”, but don’t think they have enough for themselves.

Read about, watch, or listen to golfers as they talk about confidence, and how revered this trait is! As with all the topics about which I write, the specific answer for optimal confidence is somewhat dependent on each and every person’s own set of circumstances.

Talent, opportunity, skill, luck, and many other factors can be plugged into the confidence equation. However, there are some thoughts that I have regarding confidence that I believe cut across virtually all situations.

-If you want to have the confidence of a champion, then begin training like a champion. Confidence comes primarily from optimal preparation and a sense of having all the requisite tools in the toolbox to adequately address the competitive situations that might confront you.

This means working hard on your technical, physical, and mental preparation, or be prepared to face the inevitable consequence of self-doubt and worry when faced with difficulty when performing.

-Catch yourself doing things right. Most of us, when asked, can recount a litany of things that we didn't do well the last time we were on the course.

How many things can you recall that you did well? Most of us have expectations that we're supposed to do certain things when we play, and fail to give ourselves the credit due when we do these (so-called) routine things.

Every time you hit the drive into the fairway, get a green in regulation, or two-putt from 30 feet is a positive accomplishment. How many deposits do you make in your confidence bank? If you're like most, you're certainly making plenty of withdrawals!

-Strengthen your weaknesses. Make an honest accounting of where you believe yourself to be weakest and do whatever it takes to improve.

This can be a physical or mental area, and addressing the "weakest link" will boost your confidence. Virtually every player with whom I've worked has a particular area of his or her game that feels weak relative to the rest, and few people are willing to put in the extra time and energy to overcome this. It's usually more enjoyable and less frustrating to work on our strengths.

-Measure yourself against your own criteria. Many people allow their confidence to be shaken easily and quickly because of comparisons to others. How many of us have experienced the circumstance where

we're feeling pretty good about our abilities, only to permit our egos to be bruised because someone else we see hits it further, has better touch, is more consistent, or more proficient?

This is toxic to our confidence, without regard to how we're performing. If, instead, we measure our performance based on our own realistic expectations and where we are developmentally, we are much less likely to be caught up in the race to be as good as someone else. Instead, we are in the race to improve ourselves and rely on our own standard to evaluate our gains and/or setbacks.

Question: Where should I place my focus on hole's that have given me trouble in the past?

It can sometimes be difficult to get out of one's head the past failures and struggles on a particular hole or at a particular course.

✪ MIND HACK

There may be some benefit to making sure that the course management strategies utilized for the hole are a good fit for your game. Once those adjustments are made (if necessary) then it's back to the thinking about the task at hand. Past hole "troubles" is just one form of outcome thinking.

If you're thinking about how you played previously, and you fear how you might play it the next time, you're thinking about result or outcome.

Shifting your attention to what the shot requires – "Ok, I'll hit a driver toward that chimney in the distance so that the ball ends up on the right side of the fairway"- may fill your mind in such a way as to overcome the negative thoughts and pictures from previous trials in that circumstance.

Remember similar golf shots (drivers hit to particular targets) that will fill your mind with positive pictures of having been successful with these types of shots.

Another thing to keep in mind is that our past does not have to repeat itself. In other words, simply because you have not had success on a particular hole or at a particular course previously, this does not have to have anything to do with playing that hole (or course) today.

What challenges most players in this situation is not the hole itself, but the memories of playing poorly historically. Recognize that this is nothing more than your own thinking- which you are generating in your own head!

Question: I hate comparing myself to others, but I can't help it. How can I change this?

For many golfer's, it is difficult to not notice how well others are playing and the successes they are having. This can make it difficult to focus on your own game.

★ MIND HACK

People in general have a tendency to compare themselves to others. It is a normal inclination for everyone- in and out of golf. Golf (and most sports) creates a circumstance where the measuring sticks are very tangible.

How far a person hits a ball, what their scores were, where they finished relative to someone else. These are all indicators to some of their success or failure, relative to others. The real problem is that this starts to get the player to look outside him or herself to get their approval, acceptance, or feelings of worthiness in the game.

After a while, outcome thinking and comparative analysis become the only basis for feelings of competency and success. This is a very unfortunate turn of events, because it takes away the essential elements of personal mastery- the only real and healthy measure of success in the long-term. In other words, "was I the best I could be?" is much healthier than "I'm good because I'm better than him".

Question: How do I keep my focus during long practice and play?

Many players find it difficult to maintain concentration when practicing for long periods of time.

★ MIND HACK

Make sure you have a purpose for what you're trying to accomplish. Have some specific things to work on and a way to give yourself some feedback about how you're doing.

What are your measurement criteria for success today? Create games and competitions with others or against yourself in order to stay "in it". I also suggest no more than 30-45 minutes for any one activity.

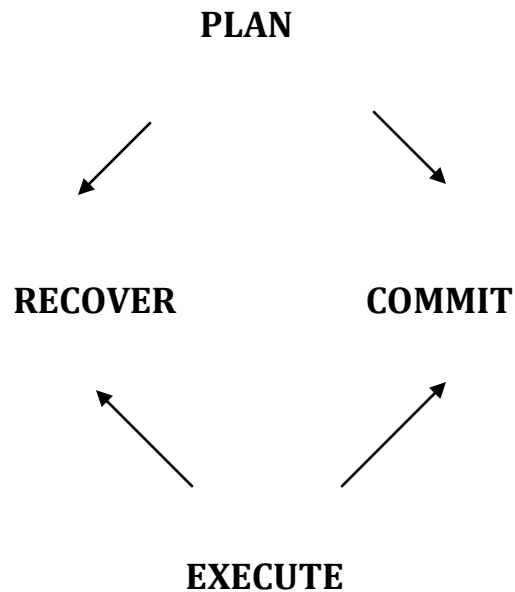
If you want to hit balls on the range for 90 minutes, it is generally easier to focus for three 30-minute sessions than one 90-minute session. Work on short game between ball-striking sessions to give your mind a break and help create some variety.

Question: How do I train myself to play one shot at a time?

The phrase “one shot at a time” is used to the point of being a cliché. Knowing how to play one shot at a time is an invaluable mental tool.

★ MIND HACK

I teach the one shot at a time concept based on a simple diagram:



Something that seems to be helpful to some players is to suggest that they recognize which element of this model they are in when they are on the course. Regularly, players are planning for the next shot without yet having recovered from the previous shot.

Another issue is that players sometimes have not fully formulated the plan in their mind before actually hitting the shot. Some of the players with whom I've worked have actually drawn this model on their glove

or in their yardage book to remind them to “check in” with themselves and make sure they are where they want to be in their thinking process when they are on the course.

If they notice that they are not in the place in the model that they want to be, they make sure and shift their attention to the appropriate area in this model.

Question: What is the difference between process and outcome thinking and how does it affect my game?

Far too many players get caught in the trap of paying too much attention to the results of their shots or their round of golf.

★ **MIND HACK**

Paying attention to the task at hand versus what this shot is “for” is what differentiates process from task. Many players are thinking about the putt being “for par” rather than the putt being 15 feet uphill with a little break to the left.

Worse than outcome thinking, some players have a tendency to think about the *consequences* of the outcome. “If I miss this par putt, I’ll be two off the lead with only two holes to play.”

Even worse than that are those that are also thinking about the *implications* of the consequences. “If I miss this par putt, I’ll be two off the lead with two to go, and I might not win this thing after having a two-shot lead at the turn.” “What will my parents say about that?”

As you can see, this implication thinking is three generations of thought removed from where I would want your attention to be. Recognize your tendencies to do this, and catch yourself if you get too far down the slippery slope away from task and process thoughts.

Question: What's the difference between trust and commitment on the course?

Many golfers have been exposed to the mental concept of “trusting” themselves on the course. The ultimate place to be as a player is to be so confident in your game that you can simply “trust your swing” or “free it up” as many of my fellow mental game gurus would advocate.

That sounds good in theory, but how do you trust your swing if you're struggling? How do you trust you're going to make this putt if you've missed four like it previously? How do you trust that you've made the correct club selection?

★ MIND HACK

The answer is that you don't need to trust. I'd like you to trust, and I'd love it if all the players with whom I work trusted their games completely. This would make their mind less cluttered, create less worry, and probably inspire them to new heights of confidence.

However, virtually 100% of the players with whom I've worked over nearly two decades in the field of mental training have times when they don't trust one aspect of their game or another. This includes juniors, college players, and PGA/LPGA Tour professionals.

When you don't have complete trust, that's when commitment becomes important. You see, committing to a plan of action, a shot selection, or a putting line, and actually striking the ball with authority helps develop trust.

Without commitment, there is the tendency to be mentally distracted, have doubts, and second-guessing prior to executing. While the full trust that all will be well may not be achieved, with commitment you

give yourself the best chance for something good to happen. As Payne Stewart was quoted as saying, “better to commit to the wrong thing in golf than to be uncommitted to the correct thing”. So, put in practical terms, how can you implement this notion into your game?

-If you are in between clubs on a shot, pick one, be decisive, and commit fully to that choice.

-If you aren't sure if the putt breaks six inches or ten inches left to right, choose one and make an authoritative stroke.

-Begin to recognize how many times you've hit a shot without being committed, and challenge yourself to pull the trigger only after you've eliminated the other options out of your mind.

Every time you're on the golf course is an opportunity for you to get feedback about yourself as a player, and the most accurate feedback you'll receive is when you've made full commitments to the shots that you hit, and then make adjustments for the future.

Without that, you may never trust certain aspects of your game, no matter how regularly you practice or play.

Question: Why do I sometimes miss the easiest shots?

Poor shots happen to the best of players around the world! As you often hear with the nature of the game, it is those poor shots which cause so much frustration and the one great shot that inspires you to continue to play the game.

★ MIND HACK

I believe that the answer to this varies depending on the player, but something that I think is largely at work here is that for many the level of concentration can drop when not significantly challenged.

When faced with a shot that is “easy”, the mind might have a tendency to wander and potentially impact the quality and consistency of the preparation elements, as well as the sharpness of focus during the execution of the shot.

Contrast with this with how sharp the focus and concentration gets in situations where more “creativity” is required. When in trouble, thinking about how to bend the ball around a tree or keep it low under a branch creates a much more concrete picture in a player’s mind. This regularly leads to players pulling off what are seemingly improbably shots

Another reason why people may miss “easy shot” is that many times players are already one shot ahead of the “easy” one they’re in. “I’ll hit this one close and make the short putt for birdie”.

This “make the short one for birdie” distraction has the player’s mind split between thinking about hitting the approach shot and thinking about the subsequent putt. Not the optimal internal dialogue for maximum concentration and effectiveness.

Question: How do I put fun back into the game?

Many people begin the game of golf with a high level of enthusiasm and find a way to have fun despite how poorly they initially might play. In time some lose that sense of enjoyment as the game's difficulties become more apparent.

★ MIND HACK

I think the answer depends on how you define “fun”. I have found it effective to help players get very concrete about what it is about the game of golf that is fun for them.

For some it is the challenge of getting better at a difficult game. For others it is the “walk in the park” notion. Still others are very plugged into the social elements that are available in the golfing community.

The challenge for some is that they get on a path that is not one that really brings them much joy or satisfaction or fulfillment, but they do not even realize that they've created a rut for themselves.

The hard truth about golf is that it takes a considerable amount of time and dedication to get extremely proficient at it. I would suggest that you recognize the realistic limits of how you're going to play this game given your level of time and energy expended on it, and attach more meaning to the other elements of the experience that do not have to do with the quality of your play or the strokes on your scorecard.

If you started at a young age, remember what that little kid was like when he or she first started hitting a ball and getting on the course and just playing for the love of it? Get back in touch with that child that is still within you and take things a little less seriously.

Question: How do I keep my confidence more stable?

Permanent confidence comes from your having successes in this game, from you recognizing the skills that you possess, and they come from feeling prepared to perform well on each shot.

These traits I call “permanent confidence”, because these are the foundational elements upon which you stand as a player when you are out on the golf course.

Assuming that you feel as though you’ve prepared yourself well, instability in confidence or “temporary confidence” comes when you are paying too much attention to how you are playing *at this moment*.

You may get on a roller coaster ride emotionally (and with your confidence) because you fear that you do not have the required tools to deal with whatever golf circumstance you find yourself in. This is especially hindered when you haven’t played very well recently.

★ MIND HACK

What is a resolution to this instability? Prepare well, practice efficiently and effectively, and pay attention when you’re on the course to the foundation upon which you stand as a player, rather than plugging into whether or not you’re playing well in the moment.

So better to have thoughts of, “doesn’t matter what just happened on the last couple of greens, I know I’m a good putter”, rather than, “what’s wrong with me?” “I can’t make a putt today!”

Allow your confidence to be slowly influenced by your development of skills and your successes, rather than instantly influenced by how well you just hit the last shot or rolled the last putt.

Question: Is there such a thing as fake confidence?

Over confidence or fake confidence is very real and can radically and negatively influence a player's game.

★ MIND HACK

Yes. Fake confidence refers to the tendency that some players have of believing that their skills are greater than they actually are. Regularly I work with players that initially tell me that they can hit certain clubs a certain distance, only for me to discover over time that their tendencies are to hit those clubs considerably shorter than I was told.

As well, players may get in difficult situations and presume that they've got what it takes to pull off low percentage shots.

Firing at tucked pins, hitting long irons or fairway woods over water carries, going for Par-5 holes in two when there is considerable danger in front, and trying to hit very difficult "bent shots" – around trees and under limbs and over trees -are among the indicators for me of a player who has an inflated sense of their game.

I want you to be confident, but also smart in the shots that you choose to hit. For the very elite players, these shots may make sense, because they have the tools to pull these off with some regularity, but because you've seen a player on TV make a certain shot does not mean that you can execute similarly!

Be as objective as possible when it comes to club selection and shot selection. This will pay off in the long run.

Question: How do I let mechanical thoughts go on the course?

Many golfers have a tendency to want to talk themselves through each swing on the course by reminding themselves of all the technical or mechanical parts of their swing.

✪ MIND HACK

There are two primary answers for this. First, it is easier to let go of mechanical thoughts if you've put the essential work into your swing in the practice areas.

You may be holding onto mechanical thoughts as a crutch, because you do not have faith and trust in your swing, because of a lack of practice or proficiency.

Spending more time getting a swing that is more automatic is a tried and true way to get more target oriented when on the course. Second, be aware that most players do a very poor job of diagnosing correctly what is going on with their swing on the course.

Regularly what happens is that the player hits a poor shot or two and tries to remember what might be "broken" so that they might be able to "fix it".

If you are like many, this will lead to a round of golf that becomes a game of trial and error with swing adjustments, typically leading to a less-than-enjoyable day on the course as you never allow yourself to get comfortable and are not playing the game, but working on your swing.

I suggest that you recognize your tendencies in ball flight and play to that tendency. Then work on the swing after the round in the practice area where it is most appropriate and helpful.

Question: Is it ok to have a mechanical swing thought on the course?

Some golfers have heard and read that having any swing thoughts when on the golf course is a bad thing. Yet many people have something related to swing going on in their heads while playing.

★ MIND HACK

It depends on you and your game, but in my experience they can be helpful. Nearly every player has some sort of thought related to swing (e.g. “keep elbow in”); tempo (e.g. “stay smooth”); or feel (e.g. “feel my weight shift in my right heel”).

These can be extremely effective for players to get consistency on the course. The challenge if you are to use one is to pick one thought and stick with it throughout the round.

Swing thoughts are not a bad thing, unless they’re changing regularly on the course or you have more than one (and sometimes two) during your swing.

Question: How do I block out distractions on the course?

Distractions can either come from outside sources (lawn mowers, partners talking, dogs barking, etc.) or from inside your own mind (thoughts and pictures of non-golf relevant things).

★ MIND HACK

One of the first things to do is to make sure that you are aware that you are distracted. If you don't recognize you were distracted until you've already hit the ball, it's too late to help you for that shot!

Learning to be more conscious on the course is the first step. After you become aware, recognize that you have the power to respond to the distraction any way you want. Many, unfortunately, allow themselves to respond with anger or frustration, and then blame the distraction for their emotional response.

Being responsible for your own reaction means that you recognize that you can choose your response (that's why responsible is from "response" "able"!) and gently shift your attention back to the task at hand in your shot.

This might necessitate stepping off the ball at address or starting your pre-shot over, but making sure that you create the internal environment necessary to be prepared to play.

Question: Should my attention on the course be internal or external?

Internal or external refers to whether your awareness is on something going on in your head or outside of yourself.

✪ MIND HACK

The answer to your question depends on where you are in the process of playing the hole. The key is to shift your attention to the relevant place during the appropriate time.

When it is time to be in your head adding up the factors that help you determine a club selection, it would not be a good time to be externally aware.

Conversely, when you want to be focusing on picking out a small target to hit the ball towards would not be a good time to be thinking about what you did on the previous hole or what you will be eating for lunch later. You can actually train yourself to be purposeful with your attention shifts even off the golf course.

Wherever you are or whatever you're doing throughout the day, there are opportunities to shift your attention from internal to external. As an example, if reading a book, focus in on the shape of the letters in a word in the book, and then shift to a thought in your mind. Then go back to noticing the whole page of the book rather than just the word that you just read.

You can shift your attention from what you're seeing to what you smell to what you hear to what you're touching and back into your thoughts. This is an exercise that I use with players all the time.

Question: I've been told I can never be a great player if I get angry on the course. Is this true?

Watching golfers practice and play regularly, you see people who allow their anger to be harmful to their performance and their enjoyment of the game.

★ **MIND HACK**

I have never seen or worked with a great player who did not get angry on the golf course, so I do not agree with this. Anger is not a bad thing in and of itself.

The challenge with anger is to contain it and control it so that you can use the anger to your advantage. Anger is a little like fire, contain it and it can cook a great meal.

Let it get out of control, and it can burn your house down!

Virtually everyone allows themselves to react with anger on the course from time to time- some show it more than others.

How much anger you can handle and how much your anger actually helps motivate you to positive action are largely dependent on your personality and your self-control.

I would certainly suggest that most people do not handle their anger responses well and for the most part it hurts their game rather than helping it.

Question: How do I know if I am too anxious on the course?

Standing on the first tee box, preparing for a four-foot downhill breaking putt, coming down the stretch and knowing you are tied for the lead. These examples and thousands of others are the kinds of situations in which you might get “overanxious” on the course and let that affect your performance negatively.

★ MIND HACK

Typically you might recognize this in what’s happening to you physiologically. These might be identified through an increased heart rate, increased perspiration, butterflies in the stomach, muscles getting tense or shaky. You might also notice it mentally, with your concentration being difficult or your thoughts jumping around in your head.

Any of these might indicate an “overanxious” response. Recognizing these symptoms and having specific strategies to address these would be invaluable to you, in the event this occurred.

These strategies have been outlined earlier- breathing exercises, restructuring or reframing your thinking, and using a thought-stopping technique are but a few tactics.

The main points here are these:

- 1) have some specific coping plans in the event this type of response befalls you on the course and...
- 2) make sure that you do not misinterpret the natural and beneficial charging up of your body and mind as something bad or overdone.

Remember it is necessary for our bodies and minds to be engaged in order to have a chance to peak perform. Pay attention and learn how to gauge how much is a helpful amount of activation of your body/mind, and at what point does this cross the line into being unhelpful.

Question: Is it possible to be over motivated in golf?

Finding the balance between being motivated and being over motivated can be challenging for some players.

★ MIND HACK

It absolutely is possible to be over motivated as a golfer. By this I mean that player who is so driven and so determined and perseveres so much that golf becomes something that pulls the player's life out of balance.

This is a player who is probably a perfectionist and probably has a tendency to create incredibly high standards and high expectations for him or herself.

When these high standards are not met, this lends itself to a feeling of inadequacy and/or insecurity, which then kicks in a tendency toward competitive anxiety because of a fear of failing. This is a player who, even if successful in most people's eyes, will not feel as though they are ever "good enough", and are great candidates for burnout.

The line between a healthy, highly motivated player and a player that is over motivated is very thin, as many of the traits exemplified by this over motivated player are the traits that produce champions.

The key is to set realistic goals, allow for a sense of satisfaction when accomplishing little things, and keeping golf in a healthy perspective.

Assessing Your Game...

Question: I know about a pre round warm up, but do I need a putting warm up? If so, what should it look like?

Many players do not have a specific pre round putting routine which can lead to inconsistencies in preparation.

✦ MIND HACK

My suggestion to a player is to make sure that whatever warm up they use works for them and that they are clear about what their intention is when they're warming up.

Generally, I'd suggest rolling a ball across the practice green, lag putting uphill, downhill, and side hills if possible, in order to get a feel for speed.

Then I suggest that the player take one ball, and work his way around the putting green selecting putts in the eight to twenty foot range, fully reading the putts and going through a full pre-putt routine.

It is critical that every putt be finished- no gimmes! We want to prepare for what is about to take place in just a few minutes. Before leaving the green, I suggest that the player finish with several made putts in the three-foot range, to get the feel, sound, and confidence of seeing the ball go in the hole.

Question: How long should my daily practice last, assuming my focus is on quality and not quantity?

Many golfers have no idea how long each practice session should take. It would be helpful to know the best and most efficient strategies for golf improvement.

★ MIND HACK

This is completely dependent on the skill level of the player, what he or she is attempting to accomplish in the practice session, and when they are going to compete next.

Generally, no more than 3-4 hours of practice off of the golf course in a session, and many can get a lot done in two hours. If one is also playing a round of 18 holes, then two additional hours would be the maximum I would generally advise for a player on any given day.

Question: Can you explain what a full pre round warm up should look like and how long should it last?

Many players do not take the time to go through a proper warm up and oftentimes lack the understanding of how best to prepare before a round of golf. A pre round warm up leads to better preparation and more consistent playing performance.

★ MIND HACK

There is no “right” amount of time for a pre-round warm up. The ultimate answer is different for every player. Generally, somewhere in the range of 45-90 minutes is what I see with the vast majority of the best players in the game. As with everything, as long as it’s purposeful, consistent, and effective, there is not a “right” answer.

The most important part of the warm-up is that it be recognized as a warm up NOT a practice session. Make sure the body is loose with dynamic movement and stretches.

Make sure that there are enough swings made with various golf clubs, hitting different golf shots with full pre-shot to different targets. Make sure to hit some bunker shots from varying lies, as well as a variety of chip shots.

Pay attention to full routine and feels on the putting green as well. For each of the players with whom I work there is a specific warm up, but there are variations off of these general themes depending on personality types and what works best for each person.

Question: What should I be thinking about when I putt?

Finding a system that works for you in practice and in competitive play is all part of the process of development as a player.

🌟 MIND HACK

This question is very personal to each player. For some the feel of the putter head is all they think about. For others it is a picture of the ball going in the hole.

Some players will remind themselves of how many putts similar to this one they've made in competitions and practice. Many will think of a phrase like, "smooth" or "tempo" or will hum a song in their mind. Helping my players find the answer to this question is one of the areas in which I spend a tremendous amount of time as a consultant.

Ultimately, it comes down to being consistent. Be purposeful about spending time remembering what you were paying attention to at times when you putted well. Replicate this thought process any time you have a putter in hand- on the course as well as the putting green.

Question: I am familiar with a pre-shot routine. What is a post-shot routine?

Without a purposeful post-shot routine, a player's reaction is left too much to randomness.

✪ MIND HACK

Most players' post-shot is left up to chance and happenstance and consists of a long string of expletives and/or self-deprecating statements, save the occasional verbal pat on the back if one happens to hit a good shot.

When I suggest to players that they change their post-shot reactions, there is typically some initial misperception that I'm suggesting that they eliminate being angry or frustrated if they hit a bad shot.

Quite the contrary; I believe that anger and frustration are natural, normal reactions to a poorly hit shot or experience of bad luck.

However, the question I ask is, "is your anger/frustration mobilizing you to action, or are you allowing it to immobilize you?" More simply put, "what are you doing about it?"

The best players in the game get angry in virtually every round they play, but the best players recover from their anger and frustration quickly and move on to the next shot. How do they do this?

The number one answer is that they train themselves to monitor their self-talk. Once you have your initial emotional reaction, check your own self-talk.

A simple guide is this: speak to yourself as you would want your caddie or instructor to speak to you. Rather than telling yourself what a horrible shot that was, or “what’s wrong with me?” or “I can’t make a putt today”, phrases like “come on, you’re better than that”; “let’s make the next one”; “stay focused on the next shot”; better preparation next time” can be very emotionally helpful and motivating, rather than the loss of confidence that comes with the other responses. Besides changing self-talk, there are a couple of other helpful hints that will aid in your post-shot recovery.

- One phrase that I use often with players is to suggest that they “flush” after every shot. Take the good from the previous shot and then flush it! I typically don’t have to get graphic to get the player to understand what I mean by “flushing it”!

- Take time to mentally reinforce the feel and sight of the good shots that you hit.

As an example, you have 150 yards to the pin and you select the club that will give you the best chance to get it close. If you hit that club well, I would want you to watch the full flight of the ball, reinforce within yourself how that felt and replay the trajectory of the shot in your mind. This will help you improve your ability to visualize this type of shot next time you’re in a similar situation.

- On the other hand, take time to rehearse the same shot if you’ve hit it poorly. In the same situation as above, if you don’t hit the ball well and chunk the ball 80 yards, rather than immediately going into a checklist of what you must have done wrong and why your swing didn’t work well, re-swing the club at full tempo until you get a good feel.

Your body and mind have a tendency to remember the last thing that you’ve done, and if you can put the iron back in your bag after having

swung it well, you're much more apt to feel good about that club when you subsequently choose to use it later in the round. This way with every club in your bag, the last swing that you executed with it was one that you liked and felt confident about.

I want to make sure and differentiate between re-swinging the club while thinking about a correction, versus swinging the club for a good feel. The golf course is not the place to attempt to analyze your swing.

This analysis is best saved for the practice area, and ideally would be done with a teaching professional's input. The truth is that most players are terrible at diagnosing their misses and are guessing when it comes to figuring out what went wrong with a shot.

Regularly players make a poor guess at what went wrong, and try to fix something in their swing that wasn't broken in the first place! Now instead of one swing flaw, you've created a second.

Continue down this line of thinking and you'll understand why you see some players' swings deteriorate as their round progresses. The key here is to re-swing thinking about a good shot, rather than thinking about correcting an error.

You'll be much more likely to swing the club fluidly and will get your head out of the way and let your body do what you've been training it to do on the practice range!

Question: It seems like every round I have at least one blow up hole. Why does this happen?

For many mid to high-handicap players, their game suffers from having very big numbers on just a few holes.

🌟 MIND HACK

For some, the honest answer is that your game may not be consistent enough to sustain quality golf for the 4-5 hours necessary to play a full round. Thus, for some the “blowup” hole is simply a manifestation of how demanding the game can be and how difficult it is to stay at or around par time after time.

For some this may be because of a lack of concentration or focus during a round, which can lead to variations in pre-shot elements. Another possible cause is related to decision-making on the course.

Regularly, “big numbers” come from people making poor choices in difficult circumstances. One of the most challenging things to some players’ ego is to “take their medicine” when in trouble.

The most skilled and talented players in the world regularly punch out sideways into the fairway or even hit shots backwards in extreme cases.

This is a mindset that accepts a bogie given a particularly difficult circumstance rather than trying to go for too much and taking the risk of putting a double bogie –or worse- into play.

Sometimes this poor decision can be one made out of pure frustration or pure panic. Having hit the ball into an unfortunate situation, many players do what I call “hit and hope”.

They see a chance to advance the ball (albeit a small chance) and hit the ball with the hope that something good will happen. Smarter players assess all of their options and weigh the risk/reward before pulling the trigger- thus reducing the chance for a “blow up hole”.

Question: How consistent does the pre-shot routine have to be?

So many players love the idea of integrating new patterns and techniques to improve play. Most players have some kind of pre-shot routine that has been developed over time, yet lacks the consistency from tournament to tournament or from one round to the next.

★ MIND HACK

The general rule is, the more consistent the routine, the better. By consistent, I mean that there are “boxes checked” in determining what type of shot to hit, and what club to use.

I mean that we would always like to have a picture of the shot before we hit it, we would always like a deep, cleansing breath before each shot, and we’d like to be paying attention to whatever relevant cues help keep us on task and in a mode of hitting the shot with confidence and commitment.

There are factors that influence the actual routine, however. There are certain shots that require more thinking time. A 40-foot undulating putt over two tiers will require more time than a straight up the hill five footer.

Thus, we cannot necessarily put a clock on the “gathering information” time and make sure that it is always exactly the same. We can, however, make sure that there is consistency in the method of gathering of information and decision making process- always within pace of play rules.

Thus, it is important to appreciate that consistency does not necessarily mean that every single time you only take one look at the target or four waggles with the club or exhale while placing your right hand on the

club. There is flexibility within the context of a consistent routine that allows for circumstances to somewhat dictate certain elements.

Question: When I get stressed, I tend to squeeze my grip too tight. What can I do to prevent this?

Many players have a tendency to increase their muscle tension in situations that are stressful or difficult. This can manifest itself in gripping the club too tightly.

★ MIND HACK

I have a couple of suggestions for grip tension that is too tight. First, is to have your grip tension be something that you are purposeful about being aware of during your pre-shot.

This is another instance of those many process-oriented goals that you could choose to prioritize as you work to develop your game.

One way that I have done it with players is for them to give themselves a number after every shot- 1 being so loose the club could come out of their hand easily and 10 being the maximum grip pressure they could apply.

Assuming that what you find is a grip pressure of say 3 out of 10 works most effectively for you, then see how many shots you can hit with a “3” grip pressure.

Or score every shot and see what kinds of shots create tendencies for you to over grip.

Are there patterns in the types of shots in which your grip pressure score was higher? This awareness can help you get consistency in this area which may help your overall ball striking

The other tip is to be used in the seconds just before you pull the club head away. Purposefully squeeze the grip of the club to the 10 out of 10, and then slowly let the pressure subside down to the 3 or 4 or wherever you feel is best for you. Then swing the club.

It would very difficult physiologically for you to be moving from tight grip pressure to less grip pressure and then to suddenly over squeeze the grip.

Question: How important is it for me to use a journal during training?

Many players get a lot of input from various instructors, as well as from playing partners and the various golf media that they access. As well, there is typically too adherence to a “plan” of development.

★ MIND HACK

The use of some kind of a daily journal or log book or diary could be an extremely helpful tool for you to use. Having a place where you make notes about things that you learn in your swing lessons, things that you recognize during practice sessions, and details of your play on the course are among the points that can assist you in becoming more efficient with your golf-related time and activities.

It is very difficult for most of us to be able to remember everything that we hear or see or experience that might be helpful for us down the road. Having a place where these details are chronicled becomes the “go to” place for information that can help us grow and develop as a player.

It can be as simple as a small spiral notebook that you keep in your golf bag and you keep notes in after your golf activities. As well, for any of your activities- including your fitness training- looking back and seeing what you’ve accomplished can continue to reinforce the confidence that can come from an acknowledgement of the hard work and effort that you’ve put into your game.

Question: How often should I use my pre-shot routine while practicing?

It is not very often that one sees amateur players using their pre shot routine in the practice areas.

🌟 MIND HACK

The short answer to this is- “as often as you’re willing to”! In the early phases of working on technical elements of your swing or putting, it is probably less important to use the pre shot every time.

However, the closer you get to integration of your swing changes or putter adjustments, the more important it is to be uniform with your pre shot. As well, the closer you get to competition or playing a round of golf, the more I advise using pre shot.

Doing the pre shot every 2nd or 3rd shot on the range or in the pre round warm up is the bare minimum. This gets your body into a more natural on-course rhythm, helps you develop positive habits of consistency in your pre shot, and helps train your attentional shifting.

Competition...

Question: What are some mental considerations for match play?

The match play format can create some special mental game challenges for some players, depending on how they interpret this type of competition.

★ MIND HACK

Your course management strategies may change based on what your opponent has done (e.g. your opponent just hit his drive in the deep rough or your opponent just hit her approach to 3 feet).

However, once you've made adjustments to your game plan we want your thought process and attention to be paid to the same things you pay attention to every day on the course- the process of hitting the next shot.

One thing to constantly keep in mind- whether in match play or stroke play- is that *what the game of golf demands doesn't change dependent on the format*. In other words irrespective of what your opponent's done and independent of where the match stands, you still want to have a clear picture of your intended shot and to be as task-oriented and "present" as possible.

One of the challenges in match play is that for many, the tendency is to become more outcome-focused and have your opponent's game influence your mental game. Again, influencing your strategy is one thing, while influencing your confidence, influencing what you're paying

attention to, influencing your body language, etc, is another thing completely.

Those who win in match play remain consistent in their approach to hitting golf shots. They stay in one-shot-at-a-time, independent of what their opponent is doing.

Question: Is the mental game different for a one day tournament vs. a multi day tournament?

There are lots of similarities, but there are some subtle differences as well. The similarities largely revolve around remembering that one of the most valuable things to bear in mind from a mental perspective is to continually bring your awareness back to playing one shot at a time, independent of where you are in relationship to par. The truth for most players is that they will score well in circumstances when they are detached from what they “have to shoot” and pay attention instead to the one-shot-at-a-time principles.

★ MIND HACK

In one-day qualifiers, there are times when the reality of being in the top “x” of the leaderboard is that one might want to take a more aggressive approach from a course management perspective. Regularly in qualifiers it requires a relatively “good” score to advance into the next round or into the tournament that one is attempting to qualify for.

In that regard, sizing up the course with the recognition that taking some calculated risks might be in order. This obviously does not mean taking crazy risks and/or attempting very low percentage shots.

I am referring instead to being a little more aggressive with shot selections, perhaps going after more pins with approach shots, and perhaps being a bit more assertive with putting as well.

One other consideration from a mental perspective is that one-day qualifiers do not allow as many holes for players to come back from making mistakes. Over 36 or 54 or 72 holes, a player has a lot more opportunity to make up for a couple of bogies or a big number.

This can create a sense for some players that they “can’t make a mistake”, which takes them down a path of worry and possibly tentative play. Staying assertive and committed to each shot can help remedy this.

Question: How do I deal with a pattern of starting off slow?

For many players, it takes a while for their game to get in “high gear”.

★ MIND HACK

The truth for many players is that they inadequately prepare for a round of golf. Far too many players show up just a few short minutes before their tee time, some literally lacing up their shoes on the first tee box! No warm up, no plan of action for the round today, no thought to anything other than to get the ball off the first tee.

Most players who are attempting to play their best round of golf understand the importance of a thorough physical warm up. Proper stretching, getting the core body temperature up to loosen muscle groups, and making swings on the range and short game area all help the preparation. Similarly, rolling some putts on the putting green beforehand helps as well.

What is less acknowledged is the benefit this has on the mental part of the game, and what is also underappreciated are some things that can be done in advance of the round that can help enhance the quality of the experience on the golf course.

On the way to the course, listening to music that is of a smooth and slow tempo can help create an internal environment that is more conducive to a smooth tempo in one’s golf swing.

It is extremely difficult for most people to drive like a maniac, talk business on the cell phone, race to the tee box and then be able to execute a smooth and rhythmic golf swing. Music that sets the tone can be helpful.

Having a specific warm up routine can also help, as a player can step to the tee box feeling as though the “boxes are checked” in relation to being prepared to play.

One of the greatest causes of competitive anxiety and loss of confidence is when a player feels inadequately prepared. Standing on the first tee knowing that the preparation has been solid helps reduce first tee jitters and helps keep confidence as high as possible.

Another important factor in getting the most out of the round is for a player to have some goal in mind before beginning the round.

Optimally, this goal would be one that is of a process nature, rather than an outcome-related goal. Process goals are things like: “I will be thorough with all my pre-shot routines today”, or “I will make sure that I have full commitment before each swing I take”, or “I will read my putts from at least two sides before I choose my line and speed”.

This will put an emphasis on something that is of value to the player’s progress, without putting prominence on outcome goals such as score.

Lastly, be cautious about labels. While acknowledging your history of starting slowly and applying some remedy can be helpful to your growth as a player, do not get in the habit of thinking of yourself as a “slow starter”.

This kind of label creates in your mind a notion of some type of permanence- similar to a genetic defect. You may have started slowly in your past, but that does not mean you are bound to this in the future!

Question: I have a hard time breaking from a lot of bogeys. How can I improve this tendency?

Once some players start a string of holes where they score poorly, they find it difficult to stop that streak.

✪ MIND HACK

The key reason why you may have a tendency to get streaky in this game is because of the difficulty you might have in staying in the present and keeping your thoughts on the task at hand.

When you make a bogie, what kind of self-talk is going on in your head? What is happening to your evaluation of yourself and your game and your round when you make a couple in a row?

I'm guessing that you are thinking about "stopping the bleeding" or "quit making bogies", which is not where I'd want you to be paying attention.

Get back in immersing yourself in your pre-shot elements and play each shot. Focus on the process and let the outcome take care of itself.

Question: How do I stop negative thoughts during a round?

Nearly every player has the experience of having unwanted and unhelpful thoughts enter his or her mind when on the golf course.

★ MIND HACK

The short answer to this is to give them as little “power” as possible. The fact that certain thoughts “pop in” is a relatively common phenomenon.

The best players recognize that this happens from time to time, and they don’t panic or get upset or obsess about the fact that it happens. They simply acknowledge the thought, and shift their attention to something that is more productive, constructive, or positive.

There is a simple technique called “thought stopping” that the strong player uses.

1. Be aware of and acknowledge the “negative” or “pop in” thought
2. Say something to yourself like “stop” or “quit it” or “forget that”
3. Change and shift your thoughts to things that are more helpful

Thus, the internal dialogue of a mentally strong player might go like this, “Don’t run this putt too far by or you might three putt”. “Hey, stop it, I’m thinking about a negative outcome.” “Let’s give this putt a chance to go in.” “I’m capable of making this one.” “Let’s get a good feel for the speed here.” This player acknowledged his “pop in thought”, and shifted to positive and constructive thoughts instead.

On the other hand, a less-mentally-strong player might think like this, “Don’t run this putt too far by or you might three-putt”. “I can’t afford a bogie here”. “Let’s take this nice and easy so that at worst I could tap in for par.”

This player has not acknowledged the “pop in thought” and is stuck in a loop of thinking about outcome, which might lead to fear and tentativeness, or anxiety and a sped up tempo.

Still another way would be for a weaker player to think, “Don’t run this putt too far by or you might three-putt.” “Uh oh, there I go again thinking about negative stuff on the course”. “That’s not the kind of thinking that I need to play well.” “What the heck’s wrong with me that I keep thinking about this stuff?” “I can’t putt well if I think like this.”

This player has actually compounded the issue of negative outcome thinking by obsessing about his thought process. This is what I meant when I referred in the first sentence to giving the thought too much “power”.

Question: How come it seems like I can't break through a particular personal best score?

Oftentimes a person's career low round creates a mental barrier that is difficult to break through. As well, certain other benchmarks (breaking 100, breaking 90, breaking par) create challenges for players as well.

★ MIND HACK

The answer to why this happens for many is that their thoughts on the course get fixated on score and outcome and they are distracted away from the optimal thought process of being task-oriented.

As pointed out previously, the more a player puts emphasis on his or her results, the less likely they will be putting emphasis on preparing well and hitting quality shots.

The mind cannot have too many things going on and still create an environment that is best for peak performance. Thus, thinking about your score, getting excited about breaking your record, and taking into account the elements necessary to hit a quality shot can create "system overload"!

Of course you will likely be aware that you are approaching your record. Of course you will likely be aware of where you are in relation to par.

The trick is to recognize this, and then shift your attention back to process elements.

Question: How important is the tempo of my practice swing or putt?

There are times when a player will take a full swing before ball striking, times when they will make a half-hearted wave with the club, and times when they don't do anything with their club during pre shot preparation.

★ MIND HACK

How you swing the club or stroke the putter in advance of actually striking the ball can be vitally important. I prefer to use the phrase "rehearsal swing" rather than practice swing, as you are rehearsing what you want to achieve, rather than practicing your swing (I hope!).

There are some who like a slow movement or even a less than full swing or stroke as a way of preparing. Given that I don't believe there is one answer for everyone, if this works well for you, then by all means continue to do this.

For those who are not consistent with their rehearsal swings/strokes, and/or don't have a strong rationale for using a slow tempo for their rehearsals, I strongly advocate the use of a full tempo feel for full swing, chips, and putts.

Essentially, I would like for you to feel what you want to feel when you execute your shot, and want you to have an internal dialogue that finishes with something like, "yes, hit the ball feeling just like that".

Too often I see players who have a pre-shot or pre-putt tempo that is vastly different than their ball-striking tempo. I believe that this incongruence lends itself for some to have greater inconsistency in their

ball striking tempo. As most any player knows, inconsistency in ball striking tempo leads directly to inconsistency in ball flight.

Goal Setting...

Question: Are expectations a good thing or a bad thing to have?

Every golfer has some level of expectation regarding their game. Each personality is different and so expectations can be realistic or unrealistic based on your set of circumstances.

★ MIND HACK

I'm not inclined to think of it in terms of "good or bad", but rather are the expectations helpful or unhelpful? For a few, expectations can be tremendous motivators and can be helpful. For many, expectations create worry and anxiety, as they fear not being able to live up to their expectations- even if they are the ones imposing it on themselves.

My suggestion for most players is that they *anticipate* success rather than *expect* it. When helping a player prepare for an event or a round or even a particular shot (when I'm caddying) I want the player to be *anticipating* the best will happen.

This helps the player to see a picture in his mind of that which he wants to create. Anticipating a positive outcome might mean things like seeing the shape of the shot, visualizing the ball rolling into the cup, picturing oneself on the phone after an event excitedly talking about how they won.

I believe these types of exercises create a positive internal environment that actually influence whether or not these types of positive things occur. While at first the difference between this and *expecting* the

outcomes may seem slight, the distinction for some players can be profound.

Ultimately, because so many players play with a thought process that contains fear and worry, I want to reduce that to the degree possible. For some, if they don't get what they *anticipate*, that's disappointing, while if they don't get what they *expect*, that can be emotionally challenging.

Question: If I'm not supposed to be focused on score or outcome, how else should I measure success?

Every player wants to feel some sense of success or progress. This is more easily done if measured in outcomes or results.

★ MIND HACK

There are an infinite number of things in this game that are a part of the process of playing golf that can be measured.

- Was my pre-round warm up thorough?
- How consistent was my pre-shot routine?
- How committed was I to each shot?
- Did I stroke my putts with assertiveness?
- Was my self-talk positive and constructive after I made a mistake?
- Was my body language positive and assertive?
- Did I refocus when I found myself distracted on the course?
- Did I adhere to my game plan well?

Any of these, and the many more like them, can be criteria that can be measured and quantified when playing. Ultimately, the more a golfer pays attention to these types of elements and measures these and gets satisfaction out of improvement on these fundamentals, the more enjoyable the game becomes and the more likely an internal environment will be created that's favorable for scoring well!

Question: What is the ultimate goal in mental training for golf?

While every player is different and everyone's strengths and weaknesses are different, there are some desired outcomes for nearly everyone's mental training process.

★ MIND HACK

In my work, I'm trying to help players reach the highest levels of competency. The first level of competency is "Unconsciously Incompetent". This is where you aren't very good and you don't know why. The next level is "Consciously Incompetent".

This is only a little better, as now you know why you still aren't very good. Where many players come to mental training is the third level, which is "Unconsciously Competent". This refers to your sometimes being effective, but you're not sure why you are effective.

At a minimum, mental training is to help players achieve "Conscious Competency". This refers to an understanding of the mechanisms of how to prepare yourself optimally and how to be as consistent as you're physically able. The ultimate goal is to reach a level of being "Unconsciously Consciously Competent".

This is a state of being where your knowledge of yourself has surpassed the levels of Conscious Competency to the point that you've turned it over in competition to your subconscious mind.

This allows for "just being an athlete" and reacting to what the game has put in front of you. This is in contrast with earlier stages, where we are trying too hard and forcing things to happen.

Question: What's the most important shot in golf (from a mental perspective)?

Many players think of certain shots or circumstances as “crucial” or “big” or “important”. How do these labels help or hurt one’s mental game?

★ MIND HACK

This is kind of a “trick” question. The most important shot in golf is the one that you’re playing! There are times when you might feel like the most important one is one that wins a tournament. You might feel like it’s the one that saves par in a “crucial” time. You might feel it’s the tee shot on the first hole.

The point is that when we apply labels like “important” or “crucial” or “big”, we send messages to the body and mind that we’d better do something special.

Another message sometimes is that we’d better not mess up in this situation, which tends to create competitive fear and anxiety. What is most favorable is to make every effort to approach each shot with the same level of preparation and focus and intensity.

This consistency helps make each shot feel “important” and reduces the potential for let down on shots that are easier and reduces the potential for worry, over thinking, or anxiety in times that are difficult or “critical”.

Remember, the shots that you’ve already hit are done; you cannot do anything yet about the shots to come after this one; and the way to best influence the outcome of this shot is to prepare well and execute with confidence.

Question: Can golf tips be hurtful as well as helpful?

This game is one where there is no shortage of information about how to be competent. From books to magazines to television shows to entire television channels devoted to the betterment of your skills. Not to mention the fact that just about anyone who has ever put a club in his or her hand has an opinion about the game that they'll be happy to share with you whether you'd like it or not!

★ MIND HACK

Quick and short “tips” can be very helpful to address some things in some fashion that have to do with your game. However, absolutely nothing substitutes for having a well conceived plan and adherence to a method over an extended period of time.

The Hall of Fame is filled with golfers with a wide variety of swings, body types, and personality types. Most of these players were relatively dutiful to a particular path toward success, with occasional minor adjustments along the way.

Most players who are less successful are willing to virtually try anything that they hear in hopes that it is the Holy Grail that they seek to help them change their game for the better.

Unfortunately, what this does for most is create a sense of confusion, clutter the mind with seemingly contradictory messages, and make for many a developmental process that is constantly in motion and constantly changing- somewhat at random.

I would suggest that you be very judicious about how much information you allow yourself to actually put to trial. While some golf tips can be moderately helpful, many more could ultimately hurt your game.

Relaxation and Mind Control...

Question: “I have a tough time ‘letting it go’ on the course and try to guide my shots.” How can I change this?

“Steering” the ball is common for players who are not very confident with a particular shot or circumstance on the course.

★ MIND HACK

“Letting it go” typically refers to making a 100% commitment to a shot and then trusting your body’s ability to swing the club or stroke the putter in the way that you’ve trained it. Essentially, when you are guiding your shots you are attempting to force an outcome, rather than engage in the process.

The best players learn how to accept the outcome of their shot *before* they hit the ball. This thought process puts emphasis on the fact that as long as you’ve done all that you can, there’s nothing more you can do!

As it is for many, it may be difficult for you to accept your humanness and recognize that you will not execute perfectly every time and to accept the myriad other things about this game that you cannot control.

However, you can emphasize in your mind in your pre shot that you are going to swing the club with full authority and roll your putts assertively. This shift in what you stress as important may help you “let it go”.

Question: What is the best way to use breathing techniques?

Many players hold their breath when they feel stressed. They allow their breathing to become rapid and shallow, potentially disrupting their optimal internal environment.

★ MIND HACK

Learning how to “center” oneself through the utilization of breathing techniques is an essential element of a player’s mental tools. Regular practice- preferably on a daily basis- of a meditative-type breathing strategy is very helpful for a player to be able to make use of this technique when in competition.

The techniques are many and varied, but the universal elements are: regular practice off the golf course, and purposeful application on a regular basis when on the golf course. I strongly suggest that a deep cleansing breath be a part of every pre-shot and pre-putt routine.

Question: How do I improve my focus on those things I cannot control in this game?

Players regularly contact me expressing frustration about a wide assortment of things with their game. Among them are: inconsistency in their swing, not being able to take their practice shots onto the course, an array of putting difficulties, dealing with slow players, how wind or cold hampers their play.

There is one thing that is common to all of these scenarios, as well as the hundreds of others not mentioned here. That common thread is that none of these things are completely within the player's control.

Even for the professional and elite amateurs with whom I work there is an irrational notion that the harder one works and/or the more knowledge one gains about this game should somehow translate into having control over this game.

When confronted directly with this, anyone who plays this game would admit they don't have control over it. Yet, time and time again, people allow themselves to get caught up and distracted by the nuances of this game over which they don't have complete control.

★ MIND HACK

One way I recommend that players focus on those few things over which they do have control is by remembering the acronym ACE.

Attitude, concentration, and effort (ACE) are the only things over which we have control in golf (and in life!). On the scorecard, I have the player give him or herself a score in each of these categories on a hole-by-hole basis.

On a 1-10 scale, with ten being the highest, I want players to attend to and work on these three factors as they play casual or competitive rounds of golf. What we see is a tremendous correlation between high ACE scores and lower stroke scores.

The more we focus on that over which we have control, the less frustration, anxiety, worry and anger we will have on the course. This regularly translates into lower scores and a higher level of enjoyment of the game.

Obviously, simply attending to the ACE variables is not going to overcome a poor swing, the fact that the players in the group in front of you are slow, or the fact that the wind is blowing 30 mph.

What reminding ourselves of ACE does do, however, is put us in the proper mind set to do all that we can to play the best that we can in that moment, whatever the conditions, and leave the rest for others to worry about!

Question: Why doesn't mental training work for some people?

The field of mental training and sport psychology has positively impacted the performance of athletes in virtually every sport around the world. However, there are some for whom it has little impact or affect.

★ MIND HACK

Mental training doesn't work for some people for the same reasons that swing instruction or fitness training doesn't work for some people. For some it is a poor fit between instructor or method and the player. For others, it is a lack of competency on the part of the educator.

For most, my experience has been that if mental training hasn't worked, it's been because of a lack of adherence to the training method, a lack of prioritization of time spent on this training, or unrealistic expectations about how quickly changes will be made.

Many players are looking for a "quick fix" or "instant solution" to a process that is very complex. Essentially, habits have been formed by many over a long period of time, and it takes a purposeful effort over a period of time to get the potential gains from the training.

For some players, they see instant ball flight change so they might adhere to swing training. These same players may feel their body soreness after even one fitness workout, and be able to feel that "something's different".

The immediate benefits from mental training are usually initially less tangible and require commitment to the process over time. For those who stick to a plan of training over time, there are inevitably rewards.

For those who hope a “tip” works miracles, there is often frustration in the long run. In short, it takes dedication to a plan of training and lots of intentional practice!

Question: I tend to feel sick to my stomach in certain competitive situations. How can I get rid of those last minute jitters?

For a lot of players the time leading up the round can be far more stressful than what happens on the golf course.

✪ MIND HACK

First of all, recognize that there are almost no players in the world of competitive golf who have learned to “get rid of” the last minute jitters.

One thing that is important is to make sure that you’re not misinterpreting what those jitters mean. They don’t necessarily mean that you’re going to play poorly- in fact when you’ve played well you’ve probably felt that on the first tee.

As well, the feelings are not just generated by fear or negative stress or anxiety. The physical response that you’re having is also generated by excitement and enthusiasm- essential elements to help you play your best golf.

Short answer- incorporate breathing exercises in your pre-round warm up and your pre shot routine and change the way you interpret those butterflies in your stomach!

Question: What is the best way to prepare mentally the night before a round?

Taking full responsibility for your tournament preparation includes having a plan for how to prepare the night before the event as well.

★ MIND HACK

This is another question that has a very personalized answer. The main point is to figure out what works best for YOU, and make sure that you're purposeful about doing those things the night before. For some players the best way to prepare is to be completely distracted.

Reading a novel, watching a movie, or talking with friends or family about non-golf related subjects typically fills this need. For others, they are helped by going over the entire course in their mind, using imagery techniques to see themselves implementing their game plan in accordance to their practice round preparation.

Still others use the time to quiet themselves through meditation, prayer, or breathing exercises. As well, having a good feel for the optimal amount of sleep can be very helpful.

Some players make the mistake of getting far too little sleep before teeing it up in competition. Some err on the side of actually being in bed too long the night before and complain of feeling groggy and sluggish on the course.

Question: When should I use imagery to help my golf game?

There is an abundance of research that shows the benefits to athletes who utilize imagery techniques.

★ MIND HACK

For golfers, there are many opportunities to use visualization techniques. Among the times when one could use this tool would be:

- 1) Seeing yourself being successful the night before the round
- 2) Picturing the course in your mind's eye before competition and imagining yourself executing your course management plan
- 3) On the course, seeing the shot shape and ball flight you intend before hitting the shot
- 4) On the green, seeing the ball rolling on your intended line into the cup
- 5) Remembering previous successes that you've had. Shots that you've hit, putts that you've made, and/or rounds in which you've played well
- 6) If injured, seeing yourself fully healed and recovered and playing as you intend

Some of these opportunities, as noted, are available to you on the golf course, while others are available to you even in a non-golf environment. The more you can picture yourself having been successful, or imagine yourself being successful, the more likely you will be to create the internal environment that is favorable to do well.

About the Author



Jeff with LPGA player Brittany Lang

Jeff Troesch is an internationally recognized expert in the field of mental skills training and performance enhancement and has been involved in training athletes and other elite performers for nearly 18 years.

Jeff served as Director of Mental Training for David Leadbetter’s Golf Academies, where he was instrumental in assisting in the development of the training programs and methodology that continues to produce golf champions around the world.

He works with several touring professionals and amateur players - assisting them in the creation of optimal training plans and developmental strategies.

Jeff’s work and his opinions have been featured in several media outlets, including: Golf Digest; Golf Week magazine; Asian Golf Magazine; Baseball America; Fox Sports’ “Going Deep”; Gillette Sports Week; Wide World of Sports; Tennis Magazine; and several international publications. Jeff speaks annually at selected AJGA events and travels with the UCLA golf team as well as elite junior competitors including Mina Harigae, the second ranked female junior golfer.