

Do you need a Golf Teacher or a Golf Coach?

Excerpts from "**Extraordinary Golf**"

by Fred Shoemaker

To most people, a golf teacher is someone who has played the game for a long time, who is an expert player, and who has a particular technical method that has been proven to result in lower scores. The teacher's job is first to teach the system to the student, then to make sure that the student stays with the system when things go wrong. The process involves initial instruction, then constant tune-up. To most people a golf teacher is a person who tells you what to do. Golf Teachers, because of their need to tell you something tend to deal in absolutes. Statements like "You have to" or "you must" dominate the sessions.

Coaches on the other hand, understand the first step to real improvement is increased awareness of **YOUR** swing, putting stroke, or chipping motion. It is the Coaches role to help you achieve this awareness. The student-coach relationship is similar to that of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. In the Conon Doyle stories, Watson's feedback would help the great detective clarify his thoughts, but it was Holmes who made the actual discoveries. Similarly, the golf coach helps the student get in touch with the experiences through which the student will discover greater awareness.

Golf Coaches guide, explain, demonstrate, focus, encourage, and show possibilities, but the heart of their interaction with students is acting as a clear, nonjudgmental mirror that reflects what really happens when a player performs a golf stroke.

A mirror that is clouded or bent will give a distorted view, as in a carnival fun house. Coaches strive to be ideal mirrors and are constantly working at being aware of things that might obscure or distort the reflections they give. The key to learning is gathering awareness. The action-awareness-result feedback loop is the process by which all deep physical learning takes place. The coach's role is to help increase that awareness and the most effective coach functions as a mirror from which the students get clear, unbiased feedback on what it is they are actually doing.

The ideal coach-student interaction would consist of the following: The student performs an action and says something along the lines of: "I was aware that I did "X", and the coach responds with something like: "I observed that you did "X" or "Y".

Can it be that Simple

Everyone tends to expect more from instruction sessions-more structure, more data, and more stuff to work on is more bang for your buck and you feel like you know more. But just because you know more doesn't mean that you can play better. We have been conditioned to think that learning is all about gathering information. There is a part of all of us that wants to control things, do more, and make things happen. However, aren't the dominant experiences in life ones of not controlling, of trusting yourself and of letting go? Coaches and students need to let go and trust themselves - and most importantly they must trust the learning process.

Imagine that you were a fourth-grade teacher many years ago, and the young Albert Einstein was in your class. You realized he has an enormous capacity for learning, and you knew what he was to become. How would you treat him? Would you fill him with information and make him memorize lots of rules? Or would you question and inspire, develop and draw out? Would you try to fill him up or try to help him grow?

In Conclusion

All human beings possess an amazing and highly developed learning system, the product of millions of years of evolution. We're just beginning to learn about this system and just beginning to be able to really communicate with it. A Coach is a person who recognizes this system, honors it, and is committed to making it work.

Please note: *Awareness does not necessarily imply understanding, just an ability to be conscious of, to feel, or to perceive.*