

Helping Golfers Improve Their Game (*Applying the Spirit of Golf to Life*)

By: Brandon Cristiano

Are you a golfer? Would you like to improve your game and lower your handicap in only seven lessons? How would you feel if you were able to get around your home course with a score of 68?

An accomplished golfer essentially requires perception which is clear and attentive; the presence and ability to control emotion, and a way of thinking and behaving which promotes creativity both on and off the course. Many golfers lack these abilities and their game suffers. As stress creeps in, many golfers leave the course more stressed and frustrated than before they started their round.

This cycle can be transformed in seven easy lessons aimed at addressing the root causes of your stress, therefore revitalizing your game.

Personally, I'm a hack on any golf course, but in return for writing this article, I've recently received the instructional course of Rupert Raikes; accredited graduate of the Motivation Institute in the United Kingdom and certified hypnotherapist famous for shooting a level par round of 68, off his handicap of 24, at Meyrick Park Golf Club in the United Kingdom.

Rupert teaches his pupils the techniques needed to turn their intention into attention simply by improving ones ability to focus. As you eliminate unwanted mind chatter and remember the pleasures you find in the game, you can clear your mind and quiet fears of performing poorly. This calmer state of presence allows for a fuller application of, and a greater focus of, your attention to the details of the game. As a bonus, Rupert shows you not only how to improve your game of golf, but how it is possible to transfer these lessons to other skill sets and apply them in your daily life.

The seven lesson course is presented in 90 minute sessions held at the driving ranges of BoPhut or Lamai and are available in English, French, or Italian. The lessons are spread out over a period of time suitable for the individual client. At least one day is recommended between each lesson to allow the student to practice specific techniques and do their 'homework' as each lesson focuses on a specific skill which then accumulate into a useful set. In brief, the lessons cover the following basic ideas:

1. How well do you actually know your home course?
2. Allow your golf swing to find you
3. Be present and you will find your sweet spot
4. Play the course with your heart
5. Victory comes with participation
6. The ball knows everything
7. We don't play golf; golf plays us!

As I previously stated, I am NOT a golfer by any means or stretch of the imagination. In the course (pun intended) of my 46 years on Earth, I can count the times I have been on a golf course OR driving range on two hands and one foot! I am a cook by profession, a musician, martial arts practitioner, and ocean going sailor. I don't hit a golf ball, I slash and hack at it. If there is evidence Rupert can improve anyones game, it would be most apparent with me!

In lesson one, Rupert takes the needed time to sit with the client, first away from the course, to establish rapport and to discover how much you think you know about your game and your favorite golf course(s). He reinforces a few basic principles of how important it is to be relaxed while at the same time being totally aware. Simple tasks of positive reinforcement are used to replace pain with pleasure and revitalize your points of success while reminding you that self-deprecating remarks are not positive. Through the conscious anchoring of memorable moments, one is able to find happiness through the simple action of doing. Upon returning from the initial meeting you are required to relive your accomplishments of the day through visualization and object animation.

'It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing' and lesson two is all about helping you finding your *signature* swing via a bit of technical tweaking. Emphasizing a calm, empty-minded approach with a relaxed and comfortable stance, Raikes helps you with all the needed foot alignments, anchors, head and chest positioning, hip movement and pivots that allow your swing to develop naturally. You will soon notice the difference between simply hitting a golf ball and having the ability to find the sweet spot.

Lessons three and four are the technical meat of the lesson plan. As lesson three continues with the development of your signature swing, lesson four expands the technical possibilities as you find multiple 'gears' for each club. By learning to control your swing and its power you are able to find short, medium, and long ranges in each club, gaining distance without sacrificing control or direction. Through your dedication and willingness to explore and implement these techniques you will be able to expand your abilities while remaining extremely relaxed, focused, and aware.

There is a time for thought and a time for action. In lesson five its time to let go, trust what you have learned, and allow the mechanics of muscle memory to take over. As you find yourself within the game, remembrance of the satisfaction and joy it has given you merely by your participation should be recognized. Let us not forget, without want or need of victory, purse, or recognition you began playing simply because it made you happy. From that joy stemmed natural relaxation without thought, but with concentration and focus. Now with the application of newly learned technique applied in parallel with gained awareness you discover each shot is anew and learn how to be comfortable not being in control.

So what have you learned? As you review the previous five lessons, lesson six demonstrates our lack of ability to control every shot, but gain the ability to recognize what factors are most influential for a preferred desirable outcome. Lesson six is more of a laboratory experiment as you make small adjustments to foot position, club distance, sight location, club extension, and the rotation of your feet, hips, and shoulders. The resulting variations become more apparent in relation to your shots and your game. You begin to approach each shot as anew and try to give yourself over to discovering where 'it' wants to go. Without the pressures of expectations or demands, the continued relaxed play builds confidence with ease of stroke and execution of shot.

Lesson seven culminates with you and Rupert again on the driving range, and if you have done your required homework there is a noticeable change in your game. Personally, just having the audacity to say I have a golf 'game' is something of note and it remains obvious I wont be joining the PGA circuit in this lifetime. But in all seriousness, this non-golfer has a newly acquired skill set with the confidence and ability not only to hit a golf ball in the general directing and distance intended, but with the knowledge of how to make the needed adjustments for both range and accuracy.

In addition to finding another agreeable outdoor pastime, it has given me one more tool I can access directly on or off the course, as a means of relaxation, enjoyment, and happiness.

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