

## Inside Your Mind: On the Golf Course

### Part Two: Confidence and Self Doubt



*\*Note: In this article for the sake of brevity I will refer to the golfer in the masculine but acknowledge it refers to both male and female golfers alike.*

Welcome to Part Two in the series; *Inside Your Mind: On the Golf Course*. This article is going to examine your levels of confidence and self doubt on the golf course relative to your performance.

Self confidence and self doubt are two areas which cause most golfers to tense up causing yips, draws and fades. By definition self confidence is *confidence in oneself and ones ability*. Self doubt on the other hand is defined as *a lack of confidence in ones ability*. Self doubt and self confidence therefore are two faces of the one coin. One is belief in your ability and the other is to lack confidence in your ability. What this indicates is that whilst you are in 'self doubt' you are not allowing yourself to be open to experiencing 'self confidence'. So to the extent that you allow yourself to experience one, you are not allowing yourself to experience the other.

The word *doubt* when you separate it from *self* is defined as: *to be uncertain about; to be inclined to disbelieve; to consider unlikely*. How effective is your game going to be if you are considering how unlikely success is going to be, because that is exactly what you are doing when

you doubt yourself? You are what you think about 100% of the time. Doubt comes into a golfers mind as a result of outside stimuli. Doubt could come into a golfers mind when he sees the course, when he hears about the next hole, when he sees a feature he needs to avoid, when he knows he needs to achieve a desired score or when he sees how well another player is hitting.

Doubt also increases as the risk or challenge increases. When the challenge increases the golfers conscious mind begins questioning. For those of you who have read Part One of this series you will know that conscious mind mediation causes tension in the golfer which directly impairs motor skill performance.

Let's look now at where doubt sits in the chain of emotional experience.

1. The golfer has to see or hear something that causes them to question their certainty about their performance
2. The golfer experiences self doubt
3. The result is anxiety or a form of self imposed tension.
4. The golfer performs the shot poorly
5. This confirms the doubt and strengthens it in the memory for next time the golfer encounters a similar situation or shot.

So can you see how this neurological process inside the mind of the golfer becomes recursive.

The key part to notice here is where the doubt sits in the process. It comes before the anxiety. Golfers often do not recognise the doubt part. Many golfers recognise that they are tense, nervous or anxious but few notice their internal doubt that fires right before they feel anxious. So really we need to be working with the doubt not the tension.

If you watch out for it you will be able to notice patterns emerging with golfers that follow this structure described above. Just notice when someone says that they can't hit with their driver or a particular club. Notice when a golfer says they can't hit a particular shot. They have experienced steps 1-5 enough times to form a belief about that club or shot. The experience has happened often enough that they now perceive this as reality. Reality is always just a construct of the mind however. In the next edition we will focus on a golfer's belief system as well as the silent demon – the ego.

The partner to doubt is 'trying'. When someone doubts their ability to perform they move into the mode of 'trying' to perform. Here is a typical scenario to illustrate. The golfer sees a difficult chip and they register the doubt about the shot. They then think, "O.k. I need to 'try' to get it up and in. The very notion of "trying" separates the golfer from their natural state of just being a good golfer. By presupposition if you have to try you are acknowledging that you aren't good enough or that you doubt your ability. A good golfer doesn't try to be naturally good, they just are.

So many golfers try to hit a long way, they try to get the ball in the hole and they try to get the ball into the air. When you take away the trying what is left? The simple act of just doing it. When you just do it you free yourself from your emotional goal posts and fluidity returns. There is no need to try when you just are, already. Trying does not make your effort greater but rather confirms your lack of confidence in your ability to perform.

This may be the first time anyone has told you to stop trying but just do it and see what happens. This applies to a lot more than golf also and for those of you who have children consider how you can use this in communication with them. Free them from the burden of trying

and encourage them to just do things and see what happens.

The same is true for confidence. Have you ever heard someone say: "I don't have any confidence"? What confidence is? How do you explain what it is?

To understand this important distinction and to really understand how this can help your mind game of golf, stop now and write down how you know when you are confident. To ensure your game is going to improve I highly recommend doing this exercise now before reading on any further.

Write down:

How you know when you are confident?

What lets you know you are confident?

What do you experience when you are confident?

\*Note your answers down in a list.

What you should end up with is something like the equation below.

X + Y + Z for me = Feeling Confident

When someone says that they don't have any confidence, I want to know what they what have instead because confidence is not something you either have or don't have. We don't possess confidence like we possess an object. So when we say we don't have any confidence what are we really saying? We are expressing that we are not feeling the set of feelings / emotions that in our experience amounts to confidence.

The list you have just done in the exercise above is your unique set of sub emotions/feelings that together let you know you are confident. The reason for breaking confidence down like this is because it is a highly nominalised state that can only be described by looking at its sub components and everyone's sub components will be different.

For example you might say:

"I know I am confident when I feel strong and certain. I notice an expanded feeling in the top of my chest and things seem very clear for me."

So you don't 'have' confidence you simply experience:

- feeling strong
- feeling certain
- feeling expanded in your chest
- things seem very clear

So if you wanted to feel confident on the course then you would want to have a direct experience of:

- feeling strong
- feeling certain
- feeling expanded in your chest
- having clarity

The simplest way to do this is to ask yourself, "How am I being when I am feeling strong?" Then associate fully to that feeling. Feel what it's like to feel strong. When you've got that feeling then ask yourself what it's like when I am feeling certain. How am I being when I am certain and associate fully to that. When I say associate I simply mean step into what it is like feeling it. At the end of this if you should have allowed yourself to really experience all these feelings and you will be in the state of confidence. If at any stage you notice your mind saying, "You're not really feeling strong" then you know you are not fully associated. Here is an example of what I would run through with a golf client I was coaching as a dialogue:

So what is it like when you are feeling strong?

*I feel taller and grounded*

And when you are taller and grounded what's that like?

*Well, it's as if I can do anything*

How do you know you can do anything?

*I just feel it inside, my body is alive,*

*my mind is focused and I am solid.*

Oh so you are solid and alive. How do you know that?

*I can feel it, it is part of me.*

Then hit the ball, body alive, your mind focused and feeling solid.



In a one to one coaching session this process is facilitated in such a way to allow both conscious and sub

conscious processing which enables the new process to become part of the client's automatic neurology. However for those of you just reading this exercise it is still a great way to help yourself access and state of confidence where doubt can't exist and then just notice what happens.

This exercise is not to be mixed up with positive thinking because it is a lot more than that. Positive thinking is telling yourself that you are feeling something NOW even if you aren't. Your mind is too intelligent to be fooled by that. This practice is about accessing the sub components of the state one by one as you build up to the actual state required. So it is feeling as opposed to thinking. This is also why affirmations don't work.

When a golfer is accessing resourceful states he is increasing the recursion of success which after time will become conditioned in the golfer's neurology. It is a practise so it needs continual repetition at the start until it becomes automatic.

The second exercise that works extremely well with both self doubt and confidence is to frame your performance in your mind before you do it.

Your pre-hit routine should include an exercise that identifies how you will be when you've achieved the desired result from your hit. The fastest way to do this is to set the intention of where you want the ball to go and how you want it to travel. Remember this is totally different to telling yourself how to execute that shot. You are simply setting your intention and then ask yourself, "How am I being when I hit the shot that way. Allow your body to access that state of being. Remember it is not about telling yourself to be a certain way through command and respond techniques but rather asking yourself how you are 'being' when you've hit that intentional shot. Notice what your unconscious mind tells you about its natural state of optimum performance and then go with it as you hit and be aware of how easily you swing naturally.

In the next edition of Inside Your Mind: On the golf course we will be looking at a golfer's belief system and how it either supports performance or cripples learning opportunities which is the foundation of ongoing



improvement. We will also cover one of the most critical parts of the mind game of golf – the ego and our

attachment to results and our own performance.

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