

Life Lessons of Golf

Transitions: The gifts of change
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“Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated; it satisfies the soul and frustrates the intellect. It is at the same time rewarding and maddening.” -Arnold Palmer

I thought my date was taking me to the driving range to learn how to swing a club and tap a tiny ball into the air, which I expected to be an easy task after all my years playing miniature golf with two young children.

No, no, no, I soon learn as I swing into the air several consecutive times, without even touching the ball. Foolishly standing there wondering if I am as naturally athletic as I once thought, I want to curse the fake green grass below my feet and that target bull-eye’s 200 yards way.

“Golf is like life,” my date tells me. “You must leave the last bad shot behind or it will negatively affect your next shot. As hard as it is, you must start fresh.”

Erase from my memory that I’m totally uncoordinated and stiff as a board? I think to myself. Then looking down at the basket of balls yet to be hit, I am determined to show him that I can transfer my tennis skills to this sport, if that truly is what you call this silly game.

He kindly and gently alters my posture (so this is “a contact sport” after all, I quietly observe). “Aren’t you just trying to give me a hug?” I teasingly ask, wanting to relax myself into learning this game.

Then, he patiently shows me how to swing. “You must trust your swing,” he advises. “You can use all the ‘swing’ thoughts you want in setting up the shot beforehand, but once you take the club back you must not have any doubt in your mind about the swing or bad things invariably happen.”

His words resonate with the way I coach clients in putting their new dreams forth to the world. They must trust their gifts and stay committed to the inner knowing of their value

without listening to any internal sabotaging thoughts or external naysayers, who sometimes are threatened by the fear of the status quo changing when we risk expressing ourselves in new ways.

Or, as an author, learning to play golf is like accepting the early rejection slips I received when I pitched my first book to some publishers. “Golf teaches humility,” my date remarks. “Everything you’ve touched in life may have turned to gold, but golf will bring you to your knees at one time or another.” Yes, helping my clients get great press as a PR executive was far easier than pleading my case as an unknown writer at the time.

Putting ourselves out there in new ways typically involves some discomfort. Yet, we learn and grow by taking risks, and doing things that stretch us beyond our comfort zones. Integrating new life lessons or challenges is best done in small, incremental steps, according to a book I often share with my clients called *“The Kaizen Way, One Small Step Can Change Your Life”* by Robert Maurer, Ph.D. Lottery winners not accustomed to sudden wealth-- like lovers on the rebound who don’t take their time in getting to know another person-- often get burned by rushing into their new states of being without careful thought and planning. Statistically, both groups don’t sustain their hoped-for happiness.

My date intuitively knew the significance of my small step forward in golf. After finally striking the ball and sweeping it into mid-air, I wanted to jump for glee. At this success, I could care less if I stood correctly or how far that ball soared. I was thrilled I made contact.

Wisely offering no further correction in this moment, my date simply smiles--giving me the encouragement to attempt to befriend another one of the 25 or so remaining golf balls sitting in the basket, waiting to challenge me that day.

Later, after discussing the parallels between life and golf, he emails this question about risks and rewards: “The green is sitting behind a large pond while the fairway curls safely around the water. You can make the green in one shot if you make it over the water or lose your ball. Do you take the chance and go for the green in one shot over the water or take the safe 2 shot path around the water? What would you do?:)”

I know in earlier years, before kids, when I used to ski black diamond trails and take solo trips to Alta, Utah without having touched upon deep powder snow before, that I would have opted for the riskier choice.

Caution entered my life with motherhood, and later with the more frequent awareness of mortality that often comes in mid-life. Now, my risks are increasingly coming more from the heart than physical challenge.

Still, taking up golf is reminding me we feel more alive when we add something new to our lives...whether it be a new friend or a new sport (or better yet, both).

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