

Winning the Mind Game of Golf, Part II

LI Golfer Magazine

Gaining control over his or her mind game begins with a golfer listening to the way they speak to themselves. Self talk, the words you hear yourself saying to yourself, have a tremendous impact on performance. “What you see is what you get” many will agree, rings true when we address the impact of creative visualization on lowering your handicap. It is also true that what you *hear*, from yourself, is often what you get. Negative self talk that begins with “I don’t want to”.....as in “I don’t want this ball in the water” or “ I don’t want to miss this putt” very often has less than the desired result. It almost seems as if your unconscious mind, fails to hear the “I don’t”. Self talk that identifies a shot as having little chance of success or a club that never seems to work, is often right on target.

The goal then is to take control of the self talk. You can decrease negative self talk by turning it down or off. Some clients chose to increase the volume of positive self talk until it drowns out everything else while others may play with the words they use. It would be interesting to see what would happen to performance and professional instruction, if negative statements were eliminated. “What if “hold the club this way” replaced “don’t hold the club that way”.

One of the strategies, selected by coaches, working with world class skiers, was to consciously develop strategies that kept anything negative out of their training facility and off their mountain. What if negative thoughts and language were left in the trunk of your car for example or in your golf cart before you approached your ball? We know that trash talk is effective in other sports when we want to psyche out an opponent. The trash talk on a golf course is internal and it has a more damaging effect when we hear our own voice, because we believe ourselves.

To begin with, all the positive self talk in the world, will not take the place of professional instruction and practice. Focusing on your mind game addresses issues like motivation to practice, commitment to instruction goals, stress reduction. Self hypnosis helps the athlete *unconsciously* and with cues to control their level of stress, regulate their demand for concentration and stimulate competitive behavior when appropriate. Motivation and self confidence can be enhanced. From the perspective of the golf professional, self hypnosis allows a golfer to make better use of instruction both through retention and application increasing his or her success. Most importantly, clients using self hypnosis notice the changes they wish to take place happening, seemingly without effort.

When we begin to listen, it is important that we put our self talk into categories.

Valid self criticism . “I’m anxious about this shot because I just haven’t practiced it enough.” OK relax, let your unconscious mind pull out your best shot for the conditions & play your shot. Add this shot to your practice or professional intervention list. You are honoring your intuition and dealing with expectations that are realistic.

Overgeneralization as in “I played like [expletive deleted]” needs to be looked at. I suggest that clients view their game through a series of small frames. Work on isolating shots or part of a shot that needs improvement either in comfort level or technical ability. Avoid including them with those that you approach feeling confident. Valid self criticism and overgeneralization are two of many factors that can be found at one end of the spectrum.

Greater difficulty comes when a golfer has the game, the shots, the course management all the skill necessary and the *mindgame* begins to slip. Some actually hear their self talk while others just feel that something is off and out of their reach to deal with. When your tape is running with a string of life issues, it can be very difficult to concentrate on your game and play your best. Blocks to success are usually quite individual. Fear of embarrassment, of disappointing a club or others who are depending on your performance can dilute your performance. Fear of success as well as fear of failure can have an elusive impact on a player. A world ranked junior athlete describes the difficulty and stress of being ahead or winning. When you’re in front, everyone is chasing you.” “It’s much easier to be the one chasing than feel people breathing down your neck.”

Success can have other ramifications. It can mean that a decisions need to be made that involve significant change and conflict. Often these issues are not obvious to the athlete but take their toll none the less. Success for your children may seem wonderful until it means beating you. As parents, we often assume that our children realize that we want them to surpass us but sometimes it needs to be verbalized. A junior golfer may need reassurance and permission to surpass his or her parent. Another golfer continued to miss a cut by one or two strokes, just missing his

goal each time. It's amazing what we can carry over with us from childhood. Using hypnosis, he discovers that statements, by a parent, that he would never be as good as his siblings, continued to unconsciously plague him as an adult.

These scenarios are interesting when they apply to the recreational player, but have far greater impact when a person's career and livelihood are on the line. Regardless, they get in the way and need to be addressed.

Negative self talk can run both before as well as after an event. Anxiety before a performance, an exam or around flying can occur far in advance of an event. For golfers, what better example than *FIRST TEE JITTERS*. Notice how discomfort, on the first tee is so commonplace and expected that it deserves capital letters and a title. Think about what might happen if golfers began to talk and write about 17th tee jitters. Over time, would golfers begin to hear themselves saying on the 15th tee "Ugh oh, one more and then the 17th"? FTJ's are not unlike *white coat syndrome*. People report a variety of physical and psychological responses both on the way too and in the presence medical personal in a white coat. Some might even argue that they would take the medical procedure rather than the feelings they have on the first tee. Self hypnosis is routinely successful with performance anxiety whether it's public speaking or the first tee. To gain control, begin by looking at when it starts. Is it before you leave home, in the parking lot, waiting to tee off, playing with a particular group, tournament play or when there are two other foursomes watching you. What do you hear yourself saying? On a scale from 1 to 10, how loud do you hear it? What stops it? What works for you? What are some of your choices to gain more control over negative self talk.

Just don't think about it, seldom seems to work. Try, until the next issue, not to think about a blue elephant. What has worked is agreeing with yourself to think about it constantly, until you are going to actually hit the ball. Just before you swing, flip a *switch* to make everything else go away but your shot. More on the *switch* later.

If it won't go away, turn it down or off part of the time. People learn quickly, under hypnosis, that they can control the volume of their self talk. A client is asked to select a statement they routinely hear themselves say that they feel works against them. Then, I suggest that they increase the volume of the voice they hear. Sometimes they recognize the voice sometimes not. The surprise for most is when they realize that they are in control, not the self talk. The client discovers that they can make the negative statements almost deafening and then turn it down until they can barely hear it. They are quickly taught strategies to modulate the sound. This strategy sets the stage for an internal discussion. The conversation, not always polite, is between your most critical voice and the one that is encouraging and feels good about your game.

So how do you turn up the positive voice? Try Bragging! How do you feel about bragging? External bragging is obnoxious but internal bragging is just what's needed, at times, to shout down the negative self talk. Talk to yourself about the great shots you make. How no one can make this shot as well as you can [OK, almost no one] and how no one has a smoother swing or better tempo. This technique, when practiced and reinforced, works well when a golfer wants to expand his or her control. Golfers also value an internal *switch* that allows them to step into a place where there is no thought or sound, just before they hit the ball.

It's probably a good time to mention what Peak Performance Self Hypnosis is and what it is not. The goal of the Peak Performance Program is to provide a client with the knowledge and experience to effectively use self hypnosis at will. Suggestions, given under hypnosis, facilitate desired learning, control stress and support change. Hypnosis speeds up effectiveness of self hypnosis, giving the client maximum control over their mind game.

How it works

In an initial interview, the golfer talks about his or her game & the changes they would like to make. After being guided into a deeply relaxed state both mentally and physically, suggestions for desired changes are made. A person is then taught self hypnosis. These suggestions have the potential to change old programming that may be in the way of an individual's goals and objectives.

When a person is in hypnosis he is more alert mentally than in his normal state of awareness. He has complete control over what he will or will not do or say. Hypnosis is a 100% consent state. At any time, a person may open



their eyes and become fully alert. Peak Performance hypnosis is not what you see in a stage show, on TV or in the movies.