

Process vs. Outcome Thinking

Playing with a Quiet Mind

Most competitive golfers originally were motivated to pursue the game of golf because of its unique and perpetual challenge. They are excited by the competition the game provides and by the exhilaration that comes from hitting those occasional perfect shots, especially under the pressure of competition.

Somewhere along the way the love of the game gives way to the pressure to perform, expectations, desires, frustrations, fear of failure, impatience and anxiety related to the very challenge they loved. Long before they even realize it, they have slipped into playing golf primarily for results (OUTCOME) and have slipped away from playing for the love of the game and the challenge of each shot (PROCESS).

Rather than experience the challenge of the uniquely difficult shots, holes, courses or conditions, the outcome thinker experiences dread, worry or even fear of the trouble the challenge presents. Coaches, teachers, family and friends can, with the best of intentions, unknowingly encourage outcome thinking with their words and actions when they themselves are too involved with results. Some competitive golfers are better prepared with attitude, priorities and personalities to retain an emphasis on the "process" of playing the game even under the most difficult circumstances. These are the players who consistently experience the greatest success.

Competitive golfers who battle with the "outcome" a majority of their play are usually the players with the greatest ups-and-downs in their games. They are also the great ball-strikers who cannot take their games on the course, and the superb social or pro-am golfers who cannot perform in competition. They are the golfers that frequently finish their rounds exhausted and upset, and the golfers that fall into long and painful slumps.

No golfer is immune to the traps of outcome thinking for the obvious reason that everything is determined by what he shoots. Whether he wins, makes money, plays in the next event, keeps his card, plays in major events, etc. is all determined by his score. It is the ability of a golfer to play "in the moment" on every shot and putt, despite the many variables that lure him to do otherwise, that allows the golfer to maximize his physical skills when playing competitively.

The purpose of this newsletter is to help develop your awareness of the variables that pull you toward outcome thinking.

Paradigms Of Outcome and Process Thinking

A paradigm is a theory or frame of reference that influences how one perceives and experiences a particular aspect of their life. With regards to your golf, you are outcome oriented when your paradigm involves a major emphasis on end results, perfection, and accomplishments. You are process oriented when your paradigm involves major emphasis on enjoying the game, keeping a quiet and peaceful mind, and accepting all adversity as a challenge to stay relaxed and focused on one shot at a time.

It is important to assess your current paradigm. Very often you will find that you are somewhere between the two. It is when a majority of your thoughts are outcome oriented that you will have great trouble with your mental game, frustrating you with the inability to get the most out of your physical game.

There are numerous examples of "good players" who elevated themselves to the level of "great players" by making the paradigm shift from outcome to process. Each gained an understanding of their own tendencies and incorporated attitude changes that allowed them to reduce emphasis on outcome and put complete thoughts and energies into the process of hitting each shot or putt.

Earlier in his career, BOBBY JONES was said to have shown dramatic displays of emotion and great anger toward himself in response to poor results on the golf course. It is also said that he was inspired by HARRY VARDON to adopt the attitude that all you can really do is... just keep hitting the ball to the best of your ability. This helped to tame his emotions and to put all his mental energies into just hitting each shot.

NICK PRICE has stated that he felt he made great advances in his career when he learned to make every shot of equal importance and to put 100% of his mental energies in executing each shot, rather than over-involve himself with results of his shots or his score.

Accepting that "whatever is supposed to happen, will happen" has helped many golfers free themselves to better accept results and just play the game to the best of their abilities. This is illustrated in a quote from JACK NICKLAUS, "...there's no doubt that a certain amount of fatalism regarding the game has contributed heavily to my career, by helping me handle the hard fact that you are always going to lose more than you win."

BERNHARD LANGER, who has successfully overcome serious bouts with the "yips", is very committed to spiritual beliefs and to a balanced life. Both allow him to stay process oriented as they allow him to keep his golfing career in perspective, de-emphasize results and therefore, play more relaxed.

When asked in an interview about his secret to putting so well, PHIL MICHELSON replied that his objective, when over the ball, is to think only about putting a good roll on the ball instead of about making the putt.

There are many more good players who do not become great players because they do not take the steps to free themselves of excessive outcome thinking as it arises. Left unchecked, outcome thinking sabotages even the greatest of skills.

Choose to Think Like a Champion

You have a choice in how you think on the golf course...

The newsletter provides some techniques to help you focus on the process and concludes:

...Outcome will take care of itself! The "Quiet Mind" exercise will help you judge how much you are focused on outcome rather than process. Determine your symptoms, then

take the steps to change to this process-quiet mind-paradigm. Consult with a qualified sport psychologist if necessary.