

## INTRODUCTION

“Gowf is a place to practice fascination . . . our feelin’s, fantasies, thoughts and muscles. All must join to play. In gowf ye see the essence of what the world itself demands . . . The game is a mighty teacher never deviatin’ from its sacred rools, always ready to lead us on . . . And I say to ye all, good friends, that as ye grow in gowf, ye come to see the things ye learn in every other place . . . Ye’ll come away from the links with a new hold on life, that is certain if ye play the game with all your heart.”

Shivas Irons, *Golf in the Kingdom*  
by Michael Murphy

**IMAGINE** hitting a solid drive down the middle of the fairway. With a perfect lie, you grab your favorite iron or fairway wood. Feeling confident that you'll not only hit the green, but get very close to the flag, you prepare for the shot. Just as you are about to swing, a thought enters your mind:

"Don't hit into the lake!"

Suddenly, you're tense, almost frozen. Feeling anxiety, pressure, or fear about hitting into the lake, you can't seem to clear these negative thoughts from your mind. Even though you're hitting your favorite club from a comfortable distance, with the same solid swing, the shot has suddenly become much more difficult.

*Your mind has interfered.* Filled with negative and defeatist thoughts such as "There's no way I'm going to clear that lake!" or "I always hit into the water," the mind has sabotaged your ability to perform.

As a golf coach, I've worked with thousands of golfers who "play" like seasoned professionals on the driving range. They hit beautiful shots almost on command, with picture-perfect finishes. However, when these same golfers step up to the first tee, things suddenly change. They begin to think about what they're doing, how they're doing it, and the consequences of not doing it right. Maybe they're remembering the last time they stood in that same place and reliving that experience in their mind. If a lake or sand trap happens to stand between them and the green, their attention—consciously

or subconsciously—often shifts toward that lake or trap.

You can guess where the ball is likely to end up.

Golf is a challenging mental exercise. One must be able to concentrate sporadically over a prolonged period of time, about four hours for an average round of golf. Sound like a long time? Well, consider this: how long do you think it takes to actually "play" golf, defined as actually swinging the club?

In our clinics, we hear everything from five minutes to an hour and a half. Try it for yourself or simply picture yourself playing a typical round of golf. Now count, from start to finish, how long it takes you to make a single swing. You'll probably come up with the same numbers as us: approximately *one to two seconds per swing*. Let's use an average of ninety shots, including putts, multiplying that by two seconds. Which means that during an average round of golf, you actually "play" golf (or swing the club) for about 180 seconds, or three minutes! So if you're only swinging a club for three minutes, then what are you doing for the other three hours and fifty-seven minutes?

Hopefully having fun, taking in the scenery and enjoying the company of your playing partners. However, more than likely, you are filling your mind with nonstop thinking, judging, overanalysis, and self-criticism of your swing and golf game. "What am I doing wrong?", "Is my head still?", "I need to keep my elbow in, my wrists cocked, my grip strong," "This is embarrassing!", or "Why can't I hit it like I did yesterday?"

Other distractions may also fill your mind. "This round is sooooo slow," "I better hurry up, people are waiting behind us," "My coach is watching," or "I just blew my entire score on that one hole!"

You may be distracted by non-golf-related thoughts. "I've got so much to do at work," "I wonder what we're going to eat for dinner," "I better not be late today, I should hurry up," or "I should be home with my kids."

When you finally reach your ball and it's your turn to hit, your mind is on overload. *Emptying your mind of all those thoughts is critical to hitting good shots.* With a crowded and busy mind, it will be difficult to focus and be present for the actual golf shot.

Concentrating for four hours straight is not only difficult, but virtually impossible. Even Tiger Woods says that he doesn't concentrate fully for four hours straight, but rather only when he needs to—right before and during each and every shot.

Simply put, a golfer only needs to concentrate for a few seconds at a time. The key is to be able to achieve this level of concentration on command *consistently* for each and every shot. This is how all players, at all levels, succeed in this game: *by playing one shot at a time.*



The mind is often filled with so many different thoughts that the body becomes totally confused. It doesn't know what you want it to do, and as a result, the body cannot complete the swing freely. Quieting the mind frees the body to do what it already knows how to do: make a smooth swing and hit the golf ball solidly. A quiet mind sets the stage for great golf shots.

All golfers, from seasoned professionals to beginning players, strive to improve their game. New gimmicks, contraptions, and swing methods are born every day, guaranteeing lower scores or your money back. Some may lead to short-term success or even marked improvement.

However, I believe there is one thing that can make perhaps the single greatest contribution toward improving your golf game (not to mention your experience of the game), and guess what? It's FREE. That's right. Often overlooked by the average player, professional golfers know it's the key ingredient to success, on and off the

golf course. If you watch professional golf tournaments, you'll see that skill alone is not what separates the winner from the rest of the pack. It's the winner's ability to master the inner game, his or her mental and emotional states, even in moments of intense pressure. It's what fuels the comeback when a winner is trailing behind.

Everyone agrees that golf is 90 percent mental, and yet so few players actually devote any energy to improving this area of their game. During a PGA Teaching Professional convention, the audience was polled and asked, "How many people think golf is more mental than physical?" Everyone raised a hand. Then they were asked, "How many people practice their mental game more than their physical game?" No one raised a hand.

How much of your practice is dedicated to the mental game?

Mental game control is now considered one of the keys to achieving long-term improvement and satisfaction on the golf course. I prefer the term *inner game* as it implies more than just mental mastery; sometimes the best thing you can do for your game is to get out of your head and trust your body. The mind-body connection has long been researched and explored in various disciplines including martial arts, sports, dance, music, art, and medicine, and without a doubt it has its place in the game of golf.

Today, many touring professionals are practicing and applying an inner approach to their game, including sports psychology, relaxation techniques, and Eastern-based disciplines such as tai chi, chi gung, yoga, and meditation. A strong consensus is building, supporting the belief that a sound mental game is as important, if not more important, than a sound physical game. Tiger Woods learned mental strategy and techniques from his father early in life. Phil Mickelson rereads his college psychology notes on visualization to get an edge. Many players have personal yoga and meditation instructors, some of whom travel with the players while they are on tour.

In the past, professional golfers rarely spoke of sports psychology as a part of their regular practice and training. Today most speak of it routinely. Players are no longer embarrassed about having a sports psychologist or reading books on the inner game of golf. Many speak of it as the key to their success.

The shift toward inner-game preparation is happening now, not only on the professional level, but on all levels, especially for the everyday golfer. Why is this shift occurring and what is causing it? I believe every person's individual desire to achieve his or her potential, both on and off the golf course, is driving this shift.

Potential is the best that you can play. Remember those perfect shots you've hit, the ones that nail the sweet spot with effortless ease so that the ball just takes off, soaring into the air? Or think about your personal best round, when everything seemed easy and simple. These moments and personal best rounds are just whispers of your potential in the game of golf.



So how do you discover your potential, and how do you play your best golf? This book will help you determine your own potential and begin the process of achieving it, both on and off the golf course.

I often ask my students, "What prevents you from playing your best golf?" Nearly everyone answers, "Inconsistency." One shot may be absolutely pure, while the next is a shank in the woods. One day they'll shoot their personal best; the next round is twenty strokes higher. Most golfers think consistency is hitting perfect shot after perfect shot.

Unfortunately, not even Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, or Bobby Jones could manage that. However, what they could master was being consistent in their approach to every shot: *setting themselves up for the possibility* of hitting a perfect shot each and every time. A consistent approach, the right attitude, and a sound philosophy

together provide a strong basis for hitting consistent shots and shooting lower scores.

Golfers vary in age, size, experience, and ability, but they share one thing in common: *passion*. Even when they're not playing golf, they're preoccupied with the game. Golfers often relive shots and rounds of golf in their minds. During meetings or sitting at the dinner table, golfers often have glazed looks on their faces, maybe thinking about that great wedge shot on 5, the birdie on 12, or the lip-out at 18 that kept them from breaking 80. They watch it more than they play it. When you turn on the TV in their homes, you'll find it on the Golf Channel.

Experiences on the golf course (i.e., feelings, emotions, actions) are deeply connected to how people live their lives off the golf course. How you carry yourself on the golf course reflects your true self. You've heard how golf is a perfect metaphor for life.

I find that my experiences on the golf course have had a direct parallel to my life off the golf course. After learning to play golf as a freshman in college, my game steadily improved over the years, with my handicap reaching the single digits. However, my game then hit a plateau, and then it got worse. My handicap ballooned, as did my frustration. I asked myself, "Why is this happening!?!"

I noticed that I was trying too hard. Attempting to be like better players, I tried to match their swings and styles. As a result, I fought my own swing, played poorly, and found little joy on the golf course. At the same time, in my professional career and personal life, I found myself trying to become someone I was not. While it seemed as if I had a lot of good things going for me on the outside, I was dissatisfied on the inside.

After taking a long break from the frustrations of golf, I later returned to the practice range and began to explore all parts of my game, including my inner game. During this process, I discovered my *natural swing*. I've been using it ever since, as I learned to enjoy

the game once again. At the same time, I began to explore ways to improve my life off the golf course.

I ultimately created a career blending my passion for golf, my love for coaching, and my fascination for the inner game and how it can have a dramatic impact on every part of our lives, including golf. I now live happily on the Big Island of Hawaii with my wife and two children and share the Seven Principles of Golf with others every day at my Spirit of Golf Academy.

I believe that if you can take one ounce of your passion for golf or whatever you truly love and apply it to the rest of your experiences, you will surely lead a more fulfilling and gratifying life. Do you experience the same level of passion at home and work as on the golf course? Do you wake up in the morning, go to work, play with your kids, and love your partner with the same fervor? Simply becoming *more aware of how you play golf* will have a positive effect on all aspects of your life.



*The Seven Principles of Golf: Mastering the Mental Game On and Off the Golf Course* will help you create a consistent, reliable way to quiet your mind and increase your focus and concentration for each and every shot, resulting in lower scores and more fun. By following one or all of the Seven Principles of Golf in our daily lives, we will begin to experience a more fulfilling and enriching life. As golfers, parents, spouses, and professionals, our outer personas or appearances are reflections of our inner selves. If we can be true to ourselves, then we can channel our pure energy and power toward creating fulfillment and prosperity in every part of our lives.

This book is divided into seven chapters, each one dedicated to one of the Seven Principles of Golf. Each chapter includes practical, easy-to-use exercises to help you put each Principle into regular practice. They will help you develop a strong mental game that will

have an impact on every shot you take *for the rest of your life*. You may begin to experience golf at a whole new level, most likely resulting in better shots, lower scores, and more fun.

Each exercise is very simple and straightforward. They are designed to be explored at your own pace, one at a time or all together in sequence. You may find that one exercise will resonate with you more than others. If so, go with your instincts and use that Principle on the golf course. Many of the golfers I have coached apply the Seven Principles in a step-by-step process to every shot. Personally, depending on the situation, I apply different Principles as needed throughout the round of golf.

In each chapter, I also offer ways to apply these Principles to everyday living. You will see that these Principles are directly linked to other aspects of your life. Whether you're a professional golfer or a newcomer to the game, I hope you will gain great wisdom and knowledge from this book to apply to your life, or join us at our golf academy on the Big Island of Hawaii and experience the Spirit of Golf firsthand.

Darrin Gee  
*Kohala Coast, Island of Hawaii*

*THE FIRST PRINCIPLE*

## **GET GROUNDED**

“You can will something to happen, with your body, with your mind. The mind is that strong. You can say, ‘I want to get this close to the hole.’ That’s where the mind comes in. The mind has to produce positive thinking. All the great players do that.”

Byron Nelson