

ADVICE OR SELF-LEARNING?

BY MICHAEL HEBRON, PGA MASTER PROFESSIONAL

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON for golfers to receive advice from a variety of sources. Family members, friends, playing partners, the media, and at the local driving range individuals they don't even know all give advice. The value of this kind of advice is not the topic here. The question is: do golfers receiving this advice and the individuals giving it know the best, or most efficient way to go about learning what is being said or demonstrated?



Michael Hebron

How does one move from the state of not knowing to knowing? While it's always useful to become aware of accurate information, it's more than important to have an efficient approach for learning information.

Over time, with the help of leading educators and cognitive scientists, I have come to realize that trying to teach is not as efficient as helping someone learn golf, or for that matter, learn any subject in school, or skill in business. The basis for our ability to learn and the decisions that should result are important topics. How do students replace their doubts with skills? The science of learning points out our brain is probably saying, "I'd like to learn, please stop teaching me!" (Even though this may sound counteractive).

Cognitive scientists study how the brain solves problems, processes information, concentrates, plans, perceives, multi tasks, learns and retains skills and information. Science has learned that these abilities are all biological in their origin. This means we do not have to try to learn, we just can and do, in safe learning developing environments without corrections, judgments, or criticisms. Sally Shaywitz (Yale University, who has studied learning for 25 years) points out, "In education we now have the potential to base instruction on scientific evidence. People today don't have to struggle to learn."

It's useful to see mankind's brain as a student, and there are environments and conditions under which our brain (like any student) can learn and perform up to its potential. But there are also conditions, which are not optimal for learning. In general, *active* learning is more efficient than *passive* learning. Studies show active self-discovery is more for encoding the brain with outcomes from our interactions with the environment for future use than passively following directions.

Concerns and questions about a lack of progress, poor outcomes, and bad habits, tend to be personal in nature. People ask, "Why is it taking me so long to learn this?" or

"Why is my child not passing?" Researchers from the science of learning would say if these questions focused less on personal concerns and more on the design and structure of the approach that is being used to educate in schools, sports instruction and business training programs, there would be a greater number of positive learning experiences. The greatest influence on return of investment in the field of education is the design and structure of approach that is

being used. Learning developing environments, where students are encouraged to "actively" use their imagination, curiosity and "what if" problem solving skills, are more efficient, and therefore more valuable for long-term retention of information, than giving students "how to" directions for fixing poor outcomes.

Dr. H. L. Kalawan, University of Chicago, said, "Learning to strike a ball is no different neurologically for the brain than learning anything else." Some golfers may believe they must do the work of learning, but they are overlooking "the greatest learning that ever takes place, learning of such vastness and complexity that overshadows all other learning, occurs in the first three years of our life. All without trying or being aware it's happening. To approach learning consciously is a biological impossibility." (p 143, *Magical Child*).

Golfers who are staying in the present, with a mind that's free of "how to" directions as they hit putts or make golf swings with the intention of what they want to do with the golf club's face, head, and shaft for the shot at hand, are using a more efficient approach to progress than trying to follow directions on "how to" move their body. Keep in mind, our brain learned what to do with a toothbrush, not "how to" move our hand. Note: all the accepted ball flight laws are for the golf club, but many golfers fill their minds with ideas about "how to" move their bodies.

When golfers can develop insights into what to do with the golf club for the shot they are about to play, (with or without advice from someone else), they can now experiment, self-organize and self-discover what works for them. Golfers often spend time trying to fix poor habits, not investing time learning core knowledge. Never try to fix poor outcomes, try again to apply what you want to do. Fixing is a negative approach to progress, that side steps learning core knowledge.

The human brain (our gateway to learning) is

designed to learn first, than teach. For example, when we learn we are off balance, we then teach ourselves to regain balance. After we learn the speed of greens, we can then teach ourselves to putt on them. Some approaches to instruction are trying to teach, with the hope students will then learn. The brain is a sense-making, problem-solving organ. Mankind is not designed to follow directions from someone else, but by hitting a putt, observing the outcome, and then making adjustments (if needed) based on past experiences. This is how we "best" learn. Efficient approaches to progress learn the "how to" after trial and feedback from doing, observing, and adjusting as we see fit.

Following "how to" directions is going out to dinner and not staying home. It's outsourcing. While an outsider can help set the table, individuals self develop through their own interactions with the environment. Following "how to" directions are trying to learn without student representation. Researchers from cognitive science point out that all the mechanics of learning, (regulatory feedback, conceptual construction and synthesis) are non-conscious procedures. Mankind is designed to invent his/her own skills and construct his/her own information base for future reference.

The brain does not act like a camera. The brain operates much like a committee, using all past experiences to influence what we are currently doing. In a "learning developing" environment all of our past putts, chip shots, short irons and wood swings are influencing the swing we are about to make. In "learning developing" environments the students mind is no longer processing corrections, the fear of failure, other negative emotions, or "how to" directions, while they are trying to perform a positive outcome. We could say "teaching fixing" approaches to learning are for window shoppers, and "learning developing" approaches for learning are buyers.

Some approaches to learning teach through correction. This is because education is about improving and improving some believe means correction or fixing. On the other hand learning developing environments are illuminating the environment so students can gain new personal insights and usable associations for self learning. By replacing corrections and criticism with core subject knowledge and awareness of outcomes, the pace of progress is enhanced. Mother Nature is in favor of personal consumer research, and is not in favor of calling in focus group for answers and "how to" directions.

PASSIVE VS. ACTIVE LEARNING

Active learning is grounded in imagination, curiosity, and what-if thinking that leads to the "value added" components of self organization, self discovery, and self development, found in learning developing environments. Passive learning, or following directions without the opportunity to develop an information base does not enhance our ability to learn. Dr. Bailey of Columbia University Teachers College said "A negative consequence of passive learning is when students are not being drawn into active problem solving and risk taking, they will develop the "wait it out" attitude of getting answers from teachers. Passive learning thus encourages only the veneer of accomplishment" propaganda often causes our eyes to become glazed over and we will miss the depth of knowledge that a grain grasping for personal insights needs. Perhaps we could say "how to" directions are a kind of propaganda, with little functional connection to the goal of long-term learning. Finding our own way of getting the story right, is at the core of quality learning.

How should golfers use self-learning or active learning? I have found when golfers have accurate core knowledge about golf's environment they come to realize there are only a few possible golf club alignments through impact. The clubhead is either behind or in front of the golfers hands; the club shaft is either swinging down to high, to low, or just right; and the clubface is either pointing in

the same direction as the swing's path or it's not. When golfers are encouraged to adjust ball locations and use a variety of shaft face and clubhead alignments, while using core knowledge, they gain deeper and richer insights into learning their swing and playing the game. My suggestion: focus on what to do, i.e., shaft before clubface through impact, and avoiding "how to" thoughts will enhance the quality of learning golfers experience. 0

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