

Optimum Performance

*It's not magic, it's born of a gift that lies in the nature of learning—
a human being's ability to learn without trying.*

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OPTIMUM performance, or the lack of one, is a topic worthy of a discussion. What follows is based on the insight that human beings (and therefore golfers) are designed to succeed and survive, not

to fail. Golfers are not designed to miss putts, hit golf balls into lakes or out of bounds. As Chuck Hogan states in *The Magic of Imagery*, which much of this article is based on. "The brain operates flawlessly and constantly at peak performance levels for the individual in whom it is installed."

Unfortunately, golfers (and non-golfers) can unknowingly be programmed to perform below their true potential in today's world of information overload.

The longer we go back in time (before man used words) into the history of man's existence, the closer we will get to the "origin" of efficient acts of learning. All great and all poor performances started with an image.

Everything in our world that is now "real," was first an image. Golf swings, chairs, rugs, paintings, etc., were first someone's image. There was a time when no words existed, and human beings and their ancient (atavistic) brain just interacted with the environment and learned to survive. This was pure creative intuition in the form of doing, observing the outcome, then adjusting if needed, based on past experiences (all without words).

SUGGESTION: The next time anyone who is reading this article swings a golf club, putts, or chips, don't think or use words, just perform.

It's unfortunate that the "mind-set" of our modern brain believes that the more information is distilled, broken down, and analyzed, the greater the opportunity for optimum performances. But when it comes to learning, sound studies and respected research from cognitive science have shown that a general, non-specific, just in the ball park image gives a greater return on the investment of time and resources, than using a detailed blueprint.

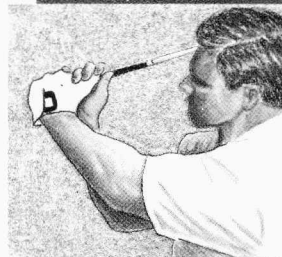
Optimum performance and efficient acts of learning

parallel the energy gathering process of sustaining life. Nature produces imperfect copies, so that an entity then has the opportunity to develop and survive by adjusting to ever-changing environments. This insight about nature's plan for survival also points to the value of non-perfect, non-exact models during acts of learning.

NOTE: A general image develops and evolves in the direction of an optimum performance through images that are personal in nature.

For a golfer we can say there are swing mechanics, physical mechanics, emotional mechanics, or mind-sets. Optimum performance normally starts with emotional mechanics and mind-sets. As respected instructor Susan Berdoy Meyers stated, "A golfer's mind-set is where everything starts and stops."

There are more than a few world-class golfers with less than perfect swing mechanics and average physical mechanics, but none that I know who don't have strong emotional mechanics and a great mind-set for playing the game. So why do so many golfers spend most of their time and efforts working on their swing mechanics,



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breaking them down into small details, that are then labeled with words.

All of our five senses, seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting provide our brain with constant sensory images. Images are the brain's most efficient way of interpreting our world. Just watch children at play. Smell is an olfactory image. Taste is a gustatory image. Feel is a kinesthetic imagery. Visual images are what our brain actually sees (without words).

Golfers who want to reach their potential should recognize all that they do and accomplish every day, without filling their conscious mind with the "do's and don't's" that words describe. Every golf shot is at first a product of imaging that often gets lost in words that attempt to describe what is about to happen. It is true, we are cursed with words. Psychologist Frederick Perls

Always practice to targets that you change frequently. Another suggestion, for every one hour spent on the long game, spend three hours on the short game. Remember, 64 percent of golf is played inside 60 yards.



points out that each of us needs to "get out of our conscious minds and into our senses. Learning is discovery."

Results on the golf course are directly proportionate to ones mind-set. Image management is the most effective approach to the kind of self-management that optimum performance is based on. Some will see imagery, as child's play and abandon its usefulness to adults.

NOTE: I have found that when golfers picture what they want to do with the golf club's shaft, head, and face through impact, they produce positive outcomes more consistently, than when they are using words to describe "how to" consciously move their body and club. See it, feel it, hear it, etc, is the message. The conscious mind has no past experience, leaving the subconscious mind, with all of its past experiences, to take the lead when it comes to optimum performances (95 percent of what we do are subconscious acts). Optimum performance is allowed to happen, not caused.

Trying to conquer the golf course is an example of a mind-set that can fragment progress. On the other hand, playing the course with a mind-set that is going to cooperate with the environment and conditions each shot presents, will support the goal of attaining optimum performance. It's the conditions under which a golfer is about to play their next shot (up or down hill, windy or not, left or right side of the fairway, etc.) that becomes the most useful swing model (image) for attaining optimum performance. Using pictures and descriptions of an expert golfer as a swing model becomes a non-efficient approach to optimal performance. Research into how the brain "best" learns suggests that expert models should be used as inspirations, not as blueprints to copy.

It helps to be inquisitive when practicing. Asking yourself or the instructor questions about what to do (not how to do it) during practice, can add understanding and accelerate learning. During a training session, criticizing yourself would be very damaging to your progress. It is not going to help to call yourself names. Evaluate outcomes, without criticizing the feedback, during training.

Practicing and training with a purpose in mind is important. At the start of your practice session focus on one portion of your game, not two or three. Always practice to targets that you change frequently. Another suggestion, for every one hour spent on the long game, spend three hours on the short game. Remember, 64 percent of golf is played inside 60 yards.

Have a curious mind during practice, but not when playing.

PLAYING/TRUSTING MIND-SET SUGGESTIONS

- On the way to the course it does not help to fill the mind with expectations, positive or negative. Expectations are damaging to performance. They will only be a distraction. We must stay in the present.
- When playing, the mind-set must be one that accepts what the game is giving on that day. Make swings, and then move on without getting too overjoyed or complaining about the results. Accept and move on!
- A "let it happen" or "effort free" mind-set when playing will do more for the quality of someone's game than any other suggestions I could make. When we put effort into our game, we lose control. The mind-set of trying harder is probably the single reason most golfers do not reach their potential on the course. Trying to consciously achieve, makes golfers less aware, and is therefore distracting to performing a motor skill.
- Having a quiet conscious mind and using subconscious feelings on the course will help golfers to reach their potential.
- Please understand *trust* will do more for the quality of someone's game than consciously *thinking* about mechanics on the course. Trust what you have practiced (it's in your subconscious).
- Winning is a result, not a cause of confidence.
- We have to be willing to fail-so stop trying not to three putt!
- Let actions just happen (do not think). In golf we have to get out of our own way.
- Always image good things, be simplistic and childlike.

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