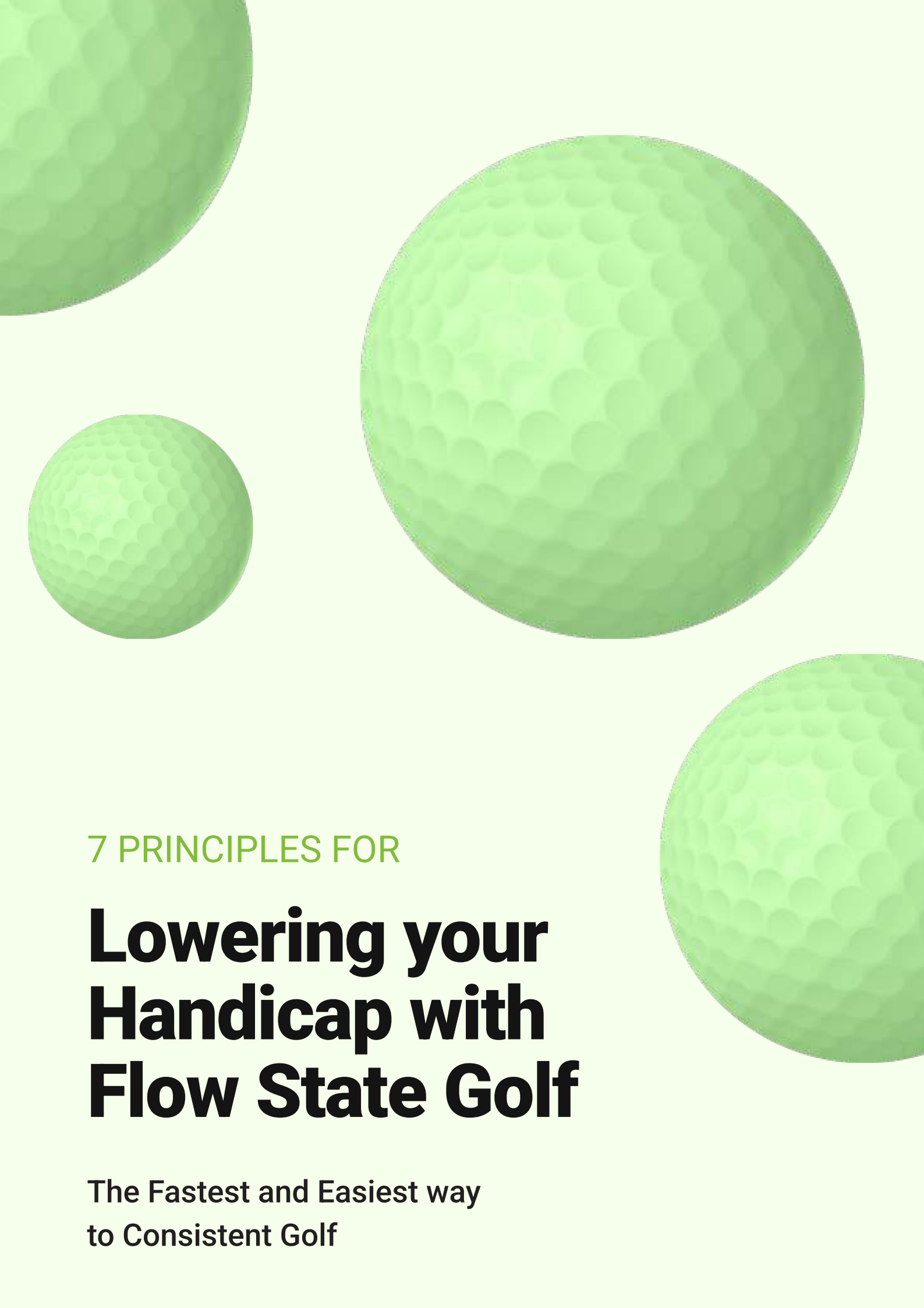




7 PRINCIPLES FOR

Lowering your Handicap with Flow State Golf

The Fastest and Easiest way
to Consistent Golf

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Who is Debbie O'Connell and why you should care

I remember the day I was in music class in 6th grade and we were singing songs from the movie Grease. The songs made me so happy and before I knew it, it was time for my favorite, We Go Together. "Chang chang changitty-chang-shoobop," but then something happened... I couldn't put the words together. I started to feel nauseous and my head was aching. I kept trying to sing, but eventually I had to give into the sudden illness that had come over me. I asked the teacher if I could go to the nurse.

When the nurse explained to my mother what had happened, she realized I was having a migraine. My mom - the coach of my basketball team - immediately picked me up from school and she told me that for my migraine I'd need to take an aspirin and get some rest before the game. She assured me, though, I'd be ready to play. She was right - I was ready, and we played and won the championship.

For years I reflected back on that day and so many others like it - when I put so much pressure on myself to perform. I found myself wondering if I had a fear of failure or a fear of success. Either way it caused worry and doubt which was not an optimal mental state for competing. I remember I didn't want to let my team or my parents down and I worried what people would think if I had a bad game. Afterall, I was the best player on the team. What if every shot avoided the basket as if it owed it money? I felt embarrassed just thinking about it.

Even at a young age I continued to strive to feel more confident and believe in myself but I didn't know how.

I went on to play Division 1 college basketball on a full scholarship and competed in the NCAA Final Four. I used positive thinking and meditation to get me through the times when I felt the doubt overtake me. I still felt like there was something more I could do to attain peak performance as my full potential seemed out of reach.

Bowling was another sport at which I competed at the highest level, achieving two perfect 300 games. In my entire life, I've never been more nervous than when I stood on the lanes needing one more strike for a perfect twelve in a row. I was in a flow state (more on this later) for every frame of that game.

It was not an easy journey. You see, I had several failed attempts at this pinnacle in bowling and actually gave up on the dream. I believed that if I was extremely nervous I could not perform. I actually tried to convince myself that it was ok if I never rolled a perfect 300 game because I had

so many other great achievements in the sport.

I struggled for so long because when I had the first 7 strikes in a row my heart would start to beat harder and faster and the nerves were tingling throughout my body. If I managed to roll a strike in the next frame my heart would pound like the bass drum in a parade. I thought it was going to burst. My strategy at the time was to fight the nerves and try to stop feeling them. This is exactly what not to do. I was actually giving it more focus and energy. At this point I would blow it ... again!

Instead of quitting, I became more determined to achieve this level of success. I decided I needed a bowling coach, fitness coach (yes, fitness for bowling) and a sports psychologist. Three months later I felt like a different person stepping onto the lanes. Being physically, emotionally and mentally prepared allowed for a flow state of mind where my deep empowering beliefs, total focus, and confidence blended to create peak performance. I felt the nerves - truly wasn't sure I could walk - but this time I didn't fight them. Instead I focused my attention on the spot on the lanes,

just like I had done for the first 11 balls I rolled. I cried when I watched my ball roll into the pocket with vengeance and hit with a force that made the pins explode.

During this time of my life it was golf that became my career, both as a player competing professionally and later as a teacher and country club professional. I've been in the golf business for over 30 years and feel so blessed to have won many awards.

Playing golf brought out even more of my anxiety around performance. The emotions of fear, frustration, doubt, worry, and sadness were intense. My thoughts included "I'm not good enough, "I don't belong," "Don't embarrass yourself," "I should quit because this is just the one sport I can't play." I hated the way I felt!

Working with the sports psychologist on my bowling also worked for golf. At the same time I rolled my first 300 game in bowling I shot my lowest competitive round of golf and it was the low round of the day. I was amazed that I beat so many players who I used to believe were so much better than me. I know it was my mindset shift that made the difference.

My years of suffering drove me to find even more answers. I knew I had the ability and work ethic but something was getting in the way - me. The space between my ears felt like my opponent. Motivated by my experiences, I delved deep into my education and research to find the answers on how to tap into the power of our own mind. To be fully open, I'm obsessed with this quest for

I discovered the fastest, most effective and easiest way to shift from a disempowering to an empowering mindset. With this shift my brain became my partner, coach, motivator and naturally has a belief in me at the deepest level.

I'm fascinated with our brains so I became a Master Certified Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Practitioner and Coach, Time Line Therapy® Practitioner, and Certified Hypnotherapist. I've also attended Tony Robbins Unleash the Power Within twice and Date with Destiny. I'm certified in Strategic Intervention Coaching by (Tony) Robbins and Madenes as well. Using my life experiences, my education and research I've created a program that works. I've seen game (and life) changing transformations in myself and my clients. They have professed that my coaching system and training offer the fastest and easiest path to success.

I am thrilled to share these principles with you!

CHAPTER 1



Embrace the change and
conquer the new way to
play golf



”

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Albert Einstein

When you want to improve or are struggling with your game, what actions do you take? If you are anything like most golfers, you'll get some golf lessons, either on your short or long game, and then do some practice. But that is just one piece of the puzzle that we call golf.

What's the other piece? Well, read what professionals say about the mental game:



”

The mind messes up more shots than the body.

Tommy Bolt



”

Golf is 80% mental, 10% ability, 10% luck.

Jack Nicklaus



”

90% of golf is mental, and the other 70% is mental too.

Jim Flick



My mental strength was probably my 15th club. I was able to stay positive, forget about bad shots, stay in the moment and trust myself. A lot of people have doubts in their minds and when you have doubts there is tension, and hesitation, and you don't perform.

Annika Sorenstam



Golf is 95% mental and 35% psychological.

Chi Chi Rodriguez



I'm about 5" from being an outstanding golfer. That's the 5" between my left ear and my right ear.

Ben Crenshaw



What separates great players from the good ones is not so much ability as brain power and emotional equilibrium.

Arnold Palmer



Confidence in golf means being able to concentrate on the problem at hand with no outside interference.

Tom Watson

The best in other sports also shared:



Ninety percent of the game is half mental.

Yogi Berra



When I ran, I felt like a butterfly that was free.

Wilma Rudolph

What all these professionals are alluding to is something you've probably heard before but maybe not. For sure, you have experienced it - flow state.

Although flow state was first researched and the term coined in 1975, it's still not widely taught or discussed today, with the exception of a few golf mental game experts. I'm happy to say neuroscience with mentions of flow state are part of the latest LPGA curriculum to educate golf instructors. My program goes to a new level in creating flow state.

Flow state is the highest level of mindset in golf and in life. In Chapter 3, I delve deeper into what

happens in the flow state and why it works. But, for the moment, to put it in a nutshell flow state will allow you to play your best golf by helping you to make the best decisions and execute your shots easily and effortlessly.

After researching this state and its principles, I have implemented them into my life and my proven methods of success. My cutting-edge approach not only teaches the principles and provides actionable steps to enhance your mindset, it also supports you in releasing the negative emotions and beliefs that are getting in the way.

Imagine playing golf with confidence, focus, resilience, positivity with an unwavering belief in yourself and your game. With an empowering mindset you will handle performance anxiety with ease. This peak state is a result of understanding and releasing what gets in the way of your best golf performance.

In my coaching I go beyond the commonly taught mental game strategies to uncover and resolve the reasons for the inconsistent play, doubt, fear, frustration, and anxiety. Once you have a mindset shift you will play without worrying about being the worst player, embarrassing yourself, hitting over water, recovering from an errant shot, needing to prove yourself or any other negative thought or emotion that does not serve you.

As a result the emotional and mental game strategies of effective practice, pre-shot routine, visualization, empowering body language and more are even more fruitful.

Often during my teaching, I encourage my students to relax their hands and stop squeezing the club. But some simply cannot loosen up - which is a problem because "loosening up" is key to swinging the club effortlessly and with speed. Sometimes I'll ask a student if they feel more comfortable when they're in control in life, to my surprise, they openly admit, "Yes, I'm a control freak." No one is born a "control freak" there is a deep-seated reason why their unconscious mind feels unsafe unless it's in control. Once we get to the root cause we unconsciously shift the beliefs.

The new way to play is to naturally play with positive energy and emotions, coupled with empowering beliefs. Golfing with a calm confidence creates effortless, free-flowing performance because you are not worrying about what others are thinking or the outcome. This sets you up to be in flow state and experience your peak performance.

Does that make you want to take a deep breath and sigh with relief? If so, you're not alone!

CHAPTER 2



Why your
golf game isn't
improving

Why your golf game isn't improving

As the game has grown, golf technology has also advanced by leaps and bounds.

With improved club designs, larger and more accurate drivers, and even the invention of new clubs, notably hybrids, I wouldn't blame you for thinking the game was easier than ever to play. And yet, the average score for an amateur still hovers around the 100-stroke mark.

And there are reasons for that. Here are some commonly made mistakes.

9 Mistakes Golfers Make Trying to Lower Their Handicap

1. **Lacking mindfulness.** The ability to focus with complete concentration is key to flow state. For golfers, the focus required at particular times is 25-40 seconds. This includes analyzing the situation, choosing the shot and club, going through your pre-shot routine, stepping in, and, of course, swinging. The challenge with golf is that we need our minds to switch in and out of focus for 4-5 hours straight (or 2 hours for 9 holes). Meditation and practicing your game mindfully will increase your ability to get into the zone.

Singer Celine Dion - a 17-handicap golfer - has it right when she says, "Golf is a search for perfection, for balance. It's about meditation and concentration. You have to use hand and brain."
2. **Playing with old equipment.** Technology has improved tremendously in equipment and the ability to test and fit players to get the most out of their ability. If you haven't done so, get a putter and club fitting and invest in the clubs that are best suited for you.
3. **Practicing ineffective.** In the practice area, you mostly see people focusing on their full swing, specifically driver. They do the "scrape and hit" method, that is, rapid fire. But, in actuality, an efficient practice is not about the quantity of shots but the quality of each one.
4. **Making poor decisions and course management.** When you ask professional golfers how much of the game is mental, their answer typically falls within a range of 80-100%. Most amateurs agree. A great mental game leads to smart decisions.

One day, I was playing golf with the LPGA Tour and World Golf Hall of Fame member Nancy Lopez, and she made a simple comment that changed my course management strategies. After my drive faded into the rough behind a tree, I was analyzing the situation and contemplating how - by aiming towards the water - I could hit a fade that would fly over the

considering the extremely high risk shot I considered. I proceeded to chip the ball back into greenside bunker onto the green. In other words, I had to hit a very challenging shot with extremely little room for error. Nancy realized what I was planning and commented, 'There are many ways to make par ... You can chip out, hit the next one close, and make the putt.' I had to admit - with a smile on my face - that was a much better idea. I actually felt embarrassed for having considered an extremely high-risk shot. I proceeded to chip the ball back into the fairway and hit my next shot onto the green close to the hole and I made my putt for par. Thank you Nancy!

5. **Lacking a consistent pre-shot routine.** I often ask my students about their pre-shot routines, and many of them tell me that they take a practice swing sometimes, but not always. A practice swing is not the only part of a pre-shot routine that is imperative to play your best and most consistent game. How can you expect to play consistently if you're not consistent in your process?

If you watch professional golfers - and this applies to most athletes, you will notice they have the same routine, whether it is before a shot, stepping into the batter's box, shooting a free throw, or serving.

6. **Having negative emotions and self-criticism.** Some players have a negative emotional response to everything that goes wrong on the golf course. They might even say, 'I'm very positive on the golf - always encouraging others,' but, when I ask them, 'How positive are you with yourself and your self-talk?' - their reaction is usually, 'Oh, I'm not very positive; I expect a lot of myself.' Research (see Van Raalte et al., 1995; Wrisberg & Anshel, 1997) has demonstrated the detrimental effects of negative self-talk on performance.

7. **Externalizing blame for poor golf.** Things outside of one's control include slow play, poor weather, playing partners, the ranger (player assistant), or bad lie, and the list goes on. And blaming such things disempowers you. As an example, say you start blaming your poor golf on slow play, well, the next time there is slow play, you've set up your brain to believe that this will cause you to play poorly, and so you probably will.

Instead, you could empower yourself by taking responsibility for the fact that you could've handled the slow play better and by reminding yourself that it was your reaction to the circumstance that created an undesirable result in your game. Once you take responsibility, you are empowered to change the outcome next time.

8. **Not stepping away from a shot when distracted.** It's more difficult than it sounds and some golfers are much better at it than others. Consider how many times you've been in your set-up and ready to start your swing and then, well, it could be anything: a thought pops into your mind, most likely negative; you hear something; a bug lands on your ball; or, maybe, you get a gut feeling that says, 'We have the wrong club.' At that moment, it's imperative that you step

away. With a combination of experience, coaching, and practice, I've learned how to step away, think through the shot again, decide on the shot (and maybe change clubs), commit to it, and do your pre-shot routine again.

I've made the mistake of staying in my step-up despite knowing I've become distracted and my focus has been interrupted. Let me tell you, it never resulted in a good shot. As I watched the ball, I would think, "I knew I should have stepped away." With a combination of experience, coaching, and practice, I've learned how to step away, think through the shot again,

9. Trying to improve without support. There is a great saying in golf, "What you feel isn't real." I'll explain this by sharing a scenario. I've asked many students to do a half backswing. After what appeared to be a full swing I asked the students to show me where they believed they finished their half backswing. They would show me the club at about waist height when in actuality the swing was at shoulder height. What they felt they did was not the reality.

I believe that coaching is key to success in all areas of life. After all, why wouldn't you want to achieve your goals faster by learning from someone who already has what you desire or who is an expert at teaching it? A trained professional is the way to go.

And this applies to all areas of your golf game. Many golfers only focus on golf performance skills - putting, chipping, pitch shot, sand, and all full swing shots. But to play your best include a golf fitness coach and mindset coach.

CHAPTER 3



Why flow
state golf works

Have you ever hit, what I call, the "I don't give a hoot" swing? Maybe you were frustrated after several missed shots and, upon deciding to throw another ball down, just swing like you didn't care. Do you remember what happened? I will venture a guess - you hit the best shot of the day. I wasn't even there, and I know that's what happened.

Here's why:

- You were in the moment: The outcome didn't matter, what anyone else was thinking didn't matter, and, more importantly, you simply looked at the ball and made your swing
- Your rhythm, tempo, and timing were all perfect
- You had no swing thoughts (actually no thoughts at all)
- You felt free and simply let the swing happen

Sometimes when I was extremely nervous, I would enter this state. It was like my conscious mind checked out because there was too much pressure, and so my unconscious mind took over.

After about 2 years of playing golf, my goal was to play on the LPGA Tour. As a member of the LPGA Teaching and Club Professionals (now known as LPGA Professionals), I had the opportunity to go to a qualifying tournament for an LPGA Tour event.

Playing in a highly competitive one-round qualifier seemed like an awesome learning experience. Since I felt I was not experienced enough or good enough yet to qualify I didn't consider the next step.

A week before the event, I received a call from the LPGA to inform me that I would be playing in the tournament. I confirmed that I would be there to qualify. But they replied, "You misunderstand, you are actually already in the LPGA tournament and don't have to qualify." What? I thanked her and hung up, still in shock. Playing in the tournament never even occurred to me as a possibility.

On the first day of the event, I was shaking from head to toe when the announcer called my name. I gave my best smile to the crowd, mostly to my family. I went through my pre-shot routine and set-up, looked at the ball, and without thinking, swung. The ball flew beautifully down the middle of the fairway. My unconscious mind had taken over.

There is much more involved in consistently entering a flow state - it isn't just a one-off stroke of luck, but rather a hyper-focused phenomenon that will take your game to the next level.

Annika Sorenstam - regarded as the best female golfer of all time - explains her state of mind while playing as a feeling of ease with everything going her way. She sees the line of putt clearly, she feels confident, and all of her decisions are spot on.

In positive psychology, "a flow state - also known colloquially as "being in the zone" - is the mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow state is characterized by complete absorption in what one is doing and by the resulting transformation in one's sense of time."

Flow state, named by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1975, has been referenced across a variety of fields, especially in occupational therapy. Though, some scholars claim that the concept has existed under other names for thousands of years.

After years of research, Csikszentmihalyi found 8 characteristics of flow state:

1. Complete concentration on the task;
2. Clarity of goals and reward in mind and immediate feedback;
3. Transformation of time (speeding up/slowing down);
4. The experience is intrinsically rewarding;
5. Effortlessness and ease;
6. There is a balance between challenge and skills;
7. Actions and awareness are merged, losing self-conscious rumination;
8. There is a feeling of control over the task.

In golf, in particular, what is the experience of being in a flow state?

- Heightened state of awareness
- Fully engaged in the moment
- No thoughts about oneself, one's performance/swing, or the outcome
- Unaware of time (in sports, flow commonly slows down time)
- Perception is altered (the fairway seems wider and the hole bigger)
- Everything feels (and is) effortless
- High level of confidence (total self-belief)
- Clear focus
- Allowing things to happen (instead of making things happen)
- Movement in total rhythm and perfect tempo
- Every stroke and swing simply flow

Researcher Arne Dietrich (2004), professor at the American University of Beirut, writes:

Recent theoretical and empirical work in cognitive science and neuroscience is brought into contact with the concept of the flow experience. After a brief exposition of brain function, the explicit-implicit distinction is applied to the effortless information processing that is so characteristic of the flow state. The explicit system is associated with the higher cognitive functions of the frontal lobe and medial temporal lobe structures and has evolved to increase cognitive flexibility. In contrast, the implicit system is associated with the skill-based knowledge supported primarily by the basal ganglia and has the advantage of being more efficient. From the analysis of this flexibility/efficiency trade-off emerges a thesis that identifies the flow state as a period during which a highly practiced skill that is represented in the implicit system's knowledge base is implemented without interference from the explicit system. It is proposed that a necessary prerequisite to the experience of flow is a state of transient hypofrontality that enables the temporary suppression of the analytical and meta-conscious capacities of the explicit system. Examining sensory-motor integration skills that seem to typify flow such as athletic performance, writing, and free-jazz improvisation, the new framework clarifies how this concept relates to creativity and opens new avenues of research.

Simply put, before a golf shot, we are thinking, analyzing, and making decisions using mostly our conscious mind. On the other hand, a flow state is when the activity in your conscious mind quiets, and your unconscious mind - which knows what to do - takes over, for example, when you step into your set-up to execute your shot.

CHAPTER4



Principle 1.

Pre-game preparation

Getting into flow starts well before a round of golf. Using my training as a Neuro-Linguistic Programming Practitioner and Coach, Time Line Therapy ® Practitioner and Certified Hypnotherapist, I've been able to help my clients get better at getting in touch with their unconscious mind and intuition. Intuition is that gut feeling - an inner knowing. It's also referred to as the internal guiding system that comes from universal consciousness.

Most likely, you've experienced intuition before: Think of that time you stood over a shot and had this feeling you should hit with a different club. Did you pay attention and step away? Or that time you had a voice telling you to bring an umbrella, but you checked the weather forecast, which showed mostly sunny. You thought, "I don't need my umbrella!" But later that day, you looked outside and realized, "Something told me to bring my umbrella today and I should've listened." Your intuition is always right.

Now imagine for a moment playing golf with your intuition guiding all of your decisions with the knowledge that you're choosing the best shot, the right club and seeing the line of putt perfectly. This easy decision-making and confidence will help you get into a flow state.

Sir Nick Faldo explains his flow experience, "I feel confident, relaxed and patient. I'm aware of my surroundings but acutely focused on each shot, and my rhythm and tempo are in harmony with my mindset and mechanics. In addition to being completely engrossed in the process of playing, my thinking is crisp, and I get so in tune with my targets that there is none of the mental interference that often accompanies competitive golf. I see the ball in relation to my target and instantly say, 'This feels like a fade' or 'that's a 5-iron.' While this is happening, somewhere in my mind, I'm also effortlessly registering my environment - dampness in the air, ground, angle, breeze, yardage. It is like the old adage: I see it, feel it, react, and execute the shot ... while running at 100 percent self-belief" (Valiante, 2012, p. vii).

Sir Nick Faldo is describing how his intuition is guiding him during this flow state. Getting in touch with your intuition and inviting it to guide you throughout a round of golf will be a major factor in allowing a flow state to unfold.

You may be wondering, how do I get to know my intuition? I have found meditation to be the fastest, easiest, and most effective way to see, hear and feel your intuition effortlessly. As a Certified Hypnotherapist, meditation is a part of my programs.

To begin, I encourage you to sit quietly and take a few deep breaths and invite your intuition to appear - however it appears is perfect for you. Pay attention throughout the day to that image, soft voice or gut feeling. Your intuition is always kind so if the voice you sense is critical or filled

with negative emotions, it's not your intuition.

Wikipedia describes intuition as "the ability to acquire knowledge without recourse to conscious reasoning. Different fields use the word "intuition" in very different ways, including but not limited to: direct access to unconscious knowledge; unconscious cognition; inner sensing; inner insight to unconscious pattern-recognition; and the ability to understand something instinctively, without any need for conscious reasoning."

CHAPTER 5



Principle 2.
Clear Goal

When you get into your car, it's important to have a defined destination. Even if you're unsure of how to get there, you can put the address into your GPS.

The same is true for choosing a golf shot. When you have a specific outcome and plan, your unconscious mind will support you in manifesting it. If you are unclear of the shot you want to execute, your unconscious mind cannot help you get the results you want.

In one tournament, I was in a large bunker short of the green - about 10 yards short of the green, not exactly greenside - and my ball was at the very front, farthest from the green and the hole. This shot - the long bunker shot that is not a full swing - is one I have found particularly challenging. I was unsure of which club to hit my sand wedge or pitching wedge. In the end, I chose the sand wedge, still with lingering doubt. Hence, I didn't take the time to visualize and commit to the shot. During my set-up, I started to feel a lack of confidence and focus. I hit the ball, feeling helpless as I watched it fly over the green, over a fence, and into a homeowner's pool. I actually laughed when it made a splash. Then reality hit home - I would have to drop another ball in the same spot because I had just hit the previous one out of bounds.

Feeling determined, I took a moment to decide on the club and shot and had a very clear picture of the ball flying out of the sand, onto the green, and rolling near the pin. I was specific with a clear and simple intention. I could see it in my mind's eye, hear the contact, and feel the sensation of a well-executed shot. I made a confident swing through the sand and watched the ball land on the green and roll close to the hole. Same girl with just a little more experience than the first attempt!

Rehearsing the shot in your mind will bring clarity. Jack Nicklaus had this to say on visualization, "I never hit a shot, even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. It's like a color movie. First, I 'see' the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I 'see' the ball going there: its path, trajectory, shape, even its behavior on landing."

Not everyone visualizes their shot like this, and some people say they don't visualize at all. But actually, everyone has this ability to see things in their mind's eye. Let me explain. When you spot someone you are looking for in a crowd, how do you know it is them? You know because you have an image of them in your mind.

We all have 5 senses - visual (vision), auditory (hearing), kinesthetic (tactile), olfactory (smell) and gustatory (taste). Each of us uses modalities at different levels. The key indicator of success in rehearsing your golf shot or manifesting anything in your life is the use of as many senses as

possible. Using more facilities makes everything seem more real and gives clarity to your desired outcome.

For golf, see your shot in your mind's eye, feel the sensation of your movements, hear the contact, smell the air, all with a deep breath in through your nose. Your unconscious mind knows exactly how to support you in executing the shot, so relax and let it happen.

Remember to have a clear, specific, and simple intention for each shot. Then imagine yourself executing the shot see what you see, hear what you hear, feel what you feel, and smell what you smell.

CHAPTER 6



Principle 3.

Meaningful & Balanced Goals

Tiger Woods took action to ensure he would play in a peak mental state during the final round of the 2000 US Open at Pebble Beach. With a 10 shot lead going into the final round, Tiger determined he needed another meaningful goal - besides winning the tournament - in order to stay sharp. He decided to challenge himself to have a bogey free final round, an amazing feat in any US Open. He started with 9 consecutive pars and then birdied 10, made par on 11, followed by 3 more birdies. After a par on 15, he made up and down on both 16 and 17 to save par; he played those holes as if he needed par to win the tournament - making his fist pump with a level of emotion that usually signified a tournament winning or tying putt. When he finished his round with a par on 18, he achieved both of his goals: winning the US Open and playing a bogey-free round on the final day. Tiger put an importance on both goals in order to stay mentally sharp and won the 2000 US Open by a record setting 15 shots.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi found in his research that the balance of perceived challenges and skills is an important factor in flow (Nakamura et al., 2009).

Nancy Lopez showed that she understood the balance of challenge and skill when she said, "The pressure makes me more intent about each shot. The pressure on the last few holes makes me play better."

Every time you go out to play, set a meaningful goal. To help you define what an inspiring outcome is for you, take a moment to ask yourself what you value about golf. When you understand what is significant to you about the game you will find it easier to create a relevant intention for your upcoming rounds of golf.

Be sure it's something that offers a challenge in line with your level of ability. If it's not an achievable goal, you'll become overwhelmed and eventually give up. Consider the opposite as well - don't make it so easy that you become bored and distracted.

When the challenge ahead of you is just right, you'll be excited, engaged, determined, and most likely a bit nervous. You'll have an enjoyable experience and at the same time prepare yourself mentally for future tournaments.

High challenge matched with high skill is the optimal set-up for flow state.

CHAPTER 7



Principle 4.

Pre-shot Routine

A very important component of setting yourself up for flow state is a consistent pre-shot routine. When I ask my students if they take a practice swing and the reply is often, "sometimes." Inconsistent actions will give you inconsistent results.

A colleague of mine told me he simultaneously watched videos of Jack Nicklaus during his pre-shot putting routine - one from early in his career and one from later. Both videos were queued up to the same moment, just before he began his routine. Starting the replays at the same time and occasionally pausing them revealed that not only did one of the greatest to ever play golf take the same actions, he performed them in the exact same timing.

You may be wondering why this is so important. Executing the same pre-shot routine the exact same way before every shot will create more consistency in your game. It supports you being in the present moment and playing one shot at a time. Even in a pressure situation, you will feel more relaxed as you begin your pre-shot routine because you signal your brain that you are doing something familiar. Our brains like familiarity. There is a sense of "oh, we've done this before, all is ok" as you begin your routine. This makes room for flow state to emerge.

Pia Nilsson and Lynn Marriot of Vision 54 coined the terms "Think Box" and "Play Box" which require different mental states. In the Think Box your conscious mind is very active analyzing and deciding. When you step into the Play Box you want to stop thinking and allow your unconscious mind to take over and perform the shot.

As you create or analyze your current routine consider these components:

Think Box - Before the shot

- Before the shot
- Analyze situation
- Decide on the club and shot
- Practice swing to begin to shift into sensory state
- Use your senses to rehearse the shot mentally
- Commit to the shot

Play Box - "The time and space over the ball in which you execute the shot."

- Step up to the ball - making the first step with the same leg and taking the same number of steps each time (practice this enough that it is automatic and does not require thoughts)
- Set-up routine - set your clubhead and feet - some players start with feet together and then

steps each time (practice this enough that it is automatic and does not require thoughts)

- Set-up routine - set your clubhead and feet - some players start with feet together and then step to the sides, others step in with their trail leg and then the lead leg. (again practice this routine)
- Present and focused
- Take a breath
- Go - time to "play"

Consistent actions will give you consistent results so take the time to have a precise pre-shot routine. Your routine will be personalized to you.

CHAPTER 8



Principle 5.

Focus

Focus is total immersion in the present moment - not a spec of attention, thought, or emotion on the outcome. Oftentimes, we split our attention, but this is not as effective as focused attention.

Nancy Lopez often describes how once she stepped inside the ropes of a golf tournament, her upcoming round was her only focus. She mentally and emotionally was able to dissociate from her world outside of golf so she could be totally immersed in her game. She was also able to do the opposite outside of the ropes with her family.

But you don't need ropes around the golf course to leave your outside world of family, career, worries or frustrations, and upcoming events to get into a peak state for your game. After all, the rest of your life will still be there after the round.

Flow is a form of escape from reality. Your mind is quiet, and nothing else matters, and you are totally immersed in the moment. For golfers, this means you are not worried about the outcome because the next moment doesn't matter.

When you are this level of engaged, you'll experience a complete loss of your sense of time. Hours may go by in a flash, while a few seconds can feel like an eternity. Golfers describe this sensation as experiencing everything in slow motion in the moment but when the round is over, feeling like only minutes have passed.

Baseball and tennis players describe a similar experience of seeing the ball come to them in slow motion, making it so easy for them to follow the ball's trajectory and to effortlessly respond.

CHAPTER 9



Principle 6.
Control

Golf is all about oxymorons according to the quote, "Golf?! You hit down to make the ball go up. You swing left and the ball goes right. The lowest score wins. And, on top of that, the winner buys the drinks." Unknown

Tiger Woods shared that, often during a high pressure shot, he would "black out." He wouldn't remember performing the shot; all he could remember is choosing his club and then watching the ball on its way to the target. He explains that it feels like getting out of his own way and letting the training take over. In other words, consciously letting go of control allowed Woods to be in flow.

This comes down to trusting yourself and your swing and letting it happen.

When you completely let go, you lose your self-consciousness, and your ego goes quiet. Most of the time, people worry about what others are thinking of them and how they are being judged. They are filled with thoughts of inadequacy and fear of embarrassing themselves with an awful shot or high score.

In flow, you are so involved in what you are doing that you don't worry about the outcome of your shot or what others are thinking. You go beyond the ego, and limiting beliefs are not present. This happens in flow because you are so engaged in your process and the present moment.

In this flow state you don't have a conscious swing thought and your unconscious mind takes over. You let your swing happen instead of making it happen.

CHAPTER 10



Principle 7. **Acceptance**

Pay attention to your automatic responses, especially how you react to your golf shots. If it didn't go as planned, what emotions do you feel? What do you say to yourself? Many people have a habit of self-criticism after every shot that does not go perfectly. This is most likely a habit in other areas of their life as well.

The results of anger include an increase in cortisol (stress hormone) levels:

The emotions that hurt your performance are the emotions of anger, frustration, disappointment, stress, insecurity, low confidence, bad attitudes or the more positive emotions of excitement, elation, and anticipation. These emotions can alter your body chemistry and influence brain wave patterns, both of which can directly interfere with your natural and trained athletic skills.

Graham & Stabler, 1999

When I ask people about this behavior, the response is usually something along the lines of, 'That's how I've always been,' or 'I expect a lot out of myself,' or 'Well, I'm a perfectionist.' But knowing that this not only doesn't help your game but actually harms it, do you still not want to change?

A negative emotional reaction to a golf shot embeds that memory with the emotions you experienced. The next time you are in a similar situation, that memory will be retrieved, most likely having a negative impact on your performance due to those negative emotions associated with it. This happens because your brain is always trying to protect you, but it can't tell the difference between fear in golf or fear because a tiger is chasing you. In both cases, it will initiate a stress response because it senses danger. Research shows that our storage of negative emotional events, compared to positive ones, is three times more robust.

Do you have "one of those holes" where you always seem to struggle? As soon as you step on the tee, even if you have been playing well, doubt and insecurity take over. My nemesis hole was number 7 on the Gold Course at Martin County Golf and Country Club. I felt my body tense up as soon as I stepped on the tee. I had been embarrassed and frustrated in many previous tee shots, and the fear of that happening again caused me stress.

The key to better golf and to stay in flow is to accept the outcome of every shot you hit. Pia Nilsson and Lynn Marriott teach that your "post-shot reaction" should be neutral or positive in order to execute a solid round of golf.

Research proves that a positive attitude lowers stress, which will result in better golf. If you don't

so already, intentionally smiling and feeling happy after a good shot is a beneficial practice. Even on those other shots, you can force a smile and say things like, "Time for an adventure," or "Let's go find it," or "Interesting," to stay neutral.

Dr. Isha Gupta, a neurologist from IGEA Brain and Spine, explains that a smile spurs a chemical reaction in the brain, releasing certain hormones including dopamine and serotonin: "Dopamine increases our feelings of happiness. Serotonin release is associated with reduced stress" (Spector, 2017).

CHAPTER 11



How to level up
your golf game with
Debbie

The challenge of entering a flow state to play golf is that you cannot make it happen. Everything about flow is easy and effortless, even allowing it to manifest.

There is good news, however; there are specific steps for you to follow to set the stage for you to easily and naturally surrender to the flow state. When you are in this state, you'll feel in total balance and rhythm while allowing your best to shine.

Most golfers' struggles are related to the mental game, yet the focus of their game improvement is their performance and skills. The belief is, "If I just start hitting my driver better, I'll have more confidence." I challenge you to think outside of the box and ask yourself, "If I increase my confidence and overall mindset, would that allow me to hit my driver better?"

Rory McIlroy says, "Don't let your golf game influence your attitude; let your attitude influence your golf game."

Spending time on mindset is the fastest and easiest way to improve your game and find yourself in flow more often. One of the keys is to figure out what gets in your way. When in flow, we allow our unconscious mind to take over, so it makes sense to go deeper into the unconscious mind for the answers.

My approach is different from others out there. I've shared my principles in this eBook, and now I'll tell you the most important factor to support you in implementing them effortlessly. The key is to have empowering beliefs in your unconscious mind that are in alignment with your conscious goals.

I work on both conscious and unconscious reframes. I've supported my clients in understanding the unconscious limiting beliefs that are getting in the way and then transforming them into empowering beliefs.

Take a moment right now to imagine yourself on the golf course. Maybe you're nervous, unsure, frustrated, or angry and struggling to hit good shots and score well. You worry about embarrassing yourself because you feel like you're not good enough. You've had moments or played holes at your best but struggle to play consistently.

Think about what's possible with flow. In Csikszentmihalyi's (2013) own words, 'The highest intrinsic motivation is a flow state where self-consciousness is lost, one surrenders completely to the moment, and time means nothing. Think of a competent musician playing without thinking, or a surfer catching a great wave and riding it with joy.'

Imagine playing golf with that kind of freedom, sense of enjoyment, effortless, clear decision-making, a calm and confident focus that engulfs you, and an ease with which you perform your best golf. If this is what you are seeking, I have an opportunity for you!

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