

as well put a club in his hand that would complement a flatter swing plane to award him for a quality shot."

Krista Dunton, PGA instructor at Bellfair Golf Club in Bluffton, S.C., says she evaluates a player's equipment during every lesson – making sure it fits the student, his or her swing, and overall type of game. Dunton also makes sure that the set composition is correct, with respect to the number of irons, hybrids, fairway woods, wedges and driver.

But here's the kicker: She uses no technology. "We do not have a launch monitor, so we have to wait for a demo day to get specific numbers," says Dunton. "However, ball flight is a great guide."

Likewise, Greg Schulze, PGA Master Professional at Sawmill Golf Club in Stillwater, Minn.,

says he keeps things basic – out of necessity. He admits he's not versed in all of today's technology, but still holds clubfitting as a craft. "I have a simple fitting cart with strike board, tape, lie angle gauge, grip size examples and other non-technical devices," says Schulze. "I am associated with a company nearby that has experts in clubfitting and has the space and resources to supply much greater technology and knowledge for those looking for an equipment change."

Many PGA instructors say they couldn't run a proper clubfitting session without the use of technology these days. Scott T. Hamilton, PGA Professional at Cartersville (Ga.) Country Club, provides what he calls the perfect fit. "The perfect fit incorporates the use of video to get the student on plane, a Vector launch monitor to

check spin and launch conditions, the use of the exact ball the student plays, and multiple fitting clubs," says Hamilton. "A couple of the problems I see with so many clubfittings are that either the student is fit for a club with an off-plane swing – which gives an improper lie angle reading – or the ball they are fit with is not the ball type they play."

And juniors who are learning the game also rely heavily on clubfitting technology. Mind you, these are young people who have embraced computers, video games and iPods as part of their daily existence. So the bulk of future golfers will be coming along with the same use-of-technology expectations regarding learning the game.

Kevin Weeks, PGA director of instruction at Cog Hill Golf and Country Club in Lemont, Ill., says that most of his clientele are serious junior

## The PGA and American Express team up

An exciting new program from The PGA and the Official Card of PGA Professionals, American Express, is rolling out this year. The American Express/PGA Friend of a Cardmember program is designed to develop new students and generate loyalty from existing students, as well as promote PGA Professionals as expert teachers of the game. Here's how it works: American Express Cardmembers who book and pay for a lesson using their American Express Card can bring a friend to the lesson at no additional cost. PGA Professionals who wish to participate in this free program will build new and repeat instruction business, and receive promotion to millions of consumer Cardmembers, as well as on americanexpress.com/golf and on PlayGolfAmerica.com. To register for the American Express/PGA Friend of a Cardmember program today, log on to PGALinks.com or PlayGolfAmerica.com.



## The problem with golf instruction from a psychologist's point of view By Michael Bader, DMH

**Editor's note:** Oftentimes a full assessment of a product or service is not complete until the consumer weighs in. To that end, on the recommendation of Northern California Section PGA Professional Billy Bondurak, we have invited Dr. Michael Bader, a San Francisco-based psychologist, psychoanalyst and golf enthusiast who has been on the learning end of dozens of golf lessons taught by a variety of golf professionals, to lend his perspective on what makes an effective lesson. Dr. Bader has been an active contributor to the psychological literature as well as a frequent contributor to various magazines and journals devoted to exploring the relationship of psychology to other disciplines. His love affair with golf began in 1993 and continues to this day.

A lot has been written by golf professionals about what amateurs need to do to improve, but we read little from amateurs about what PGA Professionals need to do to become better instructors. As a psychotherapist, I've always been interested in how people change. So, when I've gone to see a golf instructor – and I've seen many – I pay close attention to what works and what doesn't. And just as therapy varies widely in its effectiveness, so too does golf instruction.

The problem with ineffective golf instruction, as with ineffective therapy, is that the recipient often blames himself or herself for a failure to improve. In each situation, the client needs help – sometimes desperately – and is willing to put him or herself into the care of a professional. Because of this dependency, a great deal of authority is conferred on the professional. The person seeking help is eager for approval and is usually not in a position to accurately judge his or her helper. Poor outcomes usually lead to demoralization and self-blame.

Since I've spent a fair amount of time as both a helper and a person seeking help,

I've reached some conclusions about what makes the learning process work, conclusions that I think might be of value to both teaching professionals and the average golfer. But before I spell out what makes a good golf teacher, I want to add a caveat: Most of my difficulties as a golfer have nothing to do with my instruction. I've had enough good instruction to know how to improve. But like most amateurs, I don't practice or play nearly enough. As a result, I'm a 16 handicap player with an 8 handicap swing!

In my view, good golf teachers share with good therapists the following traits:

### 1) They listen to what the client wants from the session.

Too often, instructors want to teach what they know without first finding out what the student is really there for. The best teachers try to figure out if the student primarily wants a quick fix, an adjustment that will help him/her have a more enjoyable round that day, or a plan to reconstruct his/her swing. There's nothing wrong with going to a PGA Professional to get a tip that temporarily corrects a swing flaw even if that tip is a compensatory adjustment for a deeper problem. A good teacher will tailor the instruction to the agenda of the student.

For example, I was once about to leave for a special golf outing and was fighting a slice that was frustrating me to no end. I went to a teacher and explained the situation. He told me to close my stance, almost as if I was setting up to hit a big hook, and it enabled me to play several rounds on my trip from the fairway rather than the woods. In that instance, the teacher understood that I wasn't going to work with him over time to correct my more fundamental problems. Too often, I've sought help for one particular thing, not intending to sign up for a major

overhaul, and been told that my problem ultimately derived from several fundamental problems at the core of my swing. Like therapists, golf teachers can be correct but not helpful.

### 2) They learn to speak the client's language.

Some students are left-brain thinkers who respond best when the PGA Professional explains his or her suggestions intellectually, offering the student the theory guiding the instruction. Other students learn best through visual demonstrations, either computer-aided, or modeled by the instructor. And still other students need to primarily feel the changes in their own bodies. While

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—DR. MICHAEL BADER, DMH

everyone manages to eventually combine these three modalities, it's essential that the instructor quickly adapt his/her teaching style and drills to the idiosyncratic learning styles of the student.

My buddy and I once took lessons from the same person. The PGA Professional was great with my friend because he gave a lot of technical instruction – which satisfied my friend's thirst for mechanical details – but the identical instruction was frustrating to me because I learn best when I have a clear visual image of the "correct" way to do something. For example, I would have gotten more

benefit from watching my instructor illustrate the correct move, or watching a professional on a tape or computer, than from being told about it. It seems obvious that people learn in different ways, but too often golf instructors present their instruction in a "one size fits all" manner.

### 3) They accurately assess what the client is able to take in.

Like changing someone's self-defeating thinking in therapy, changing muscle memory in someone's golf swing is difficult and has to be done with great patience and reasonable expectations. When making his first major swing change in 1998, Tiger Woods reportedly hit 1,100 balls per day, most of them under the corrective guidance of a skilled coach. When amateurs like me take a lesson, we might hit a bucket or two of balls and then take the swing change to the course, only to become frustrated when the results are inconsistent. Golf instructors often give their amateur students too much information, too many ideas, too many corrections, instead of making one clear change at a time.

Recently, I was taking a lesson from a terrific teacher who was working with my tendency to pull the ball. He suggested that I experiment with feeling that my body was moving from "low to high" in the downswing and follow through in order to help me keep myself more behind the ball. It felt strange, but I worked on this the entire hour. He said very little about anything else. He told me not to worry about hitting the ball thin or even if I found myself hitting fades. I gradually began to get this feeling more ingrained and stopped pulling the ball. In the stall next to us, however, was another instructor working with a high-handicap student. The instructor was talking incessantly. He was telling the person all

about the golf swing, about swing planes, weight shifts and balance. The student was clearly overwhelmed. Golf instructors need to learn that sometimes "less is more."

### 4) They provide a "treatment" plan that is explicit.

By and large, people like to know where they're going, whether they're driving a car, doing therapy, or trying to change their golf swing. Golf instruction often fails when it is presented in a scatter-gun fashion, with no systematic game plan. Further, too often a golf coach doesn't remember what the student was working on in the previous session and reinvents the wheel each time. Let's face it – there is always something wrong with my golf swing. At any given time, a PGA Professional could look at my swing and point out several problems. However, a good teacher has a plan, an intuitive and logical strategy for helping me improve over time.

I used to see a teacher who knew a lot about the golf swing. But each time I saw him, it was clear that he had no memory of what we'd worked on two weeks before. He would look at my swing and whatever occurred to him first was what we would work on. It was always something important, but I rarely had a sense that we were building a swing, that there was a method to my/our madness. Students feel comforted and inspired when they know where they're going and when they feel that their instructor has a plan for getting there.

As in psychotherapy, the primary mistake that golf teachers make is when they put their own theories ahead of figuring out what the student/client needs. I know from both situations that there is a natural inclination in helpers to feel insecure about their expertise and authority. In response to this, the process

becomes subtly focused on demonstrating what the teacher knows rather than what the student needs.

From the point of view of the student, it's easy when they're suffering – whether in life or on the links – to put themselves into the care of a professional and to blame themselves if they don't make progress. But often the problem lies with the professional. Sometimes the professional needs their help in getting on track. Here are some ways to become a better teacher:

- 1) Ask your student to try to tell you how he or she learns best. Coax them to be as explicit as possible. For example, have them tell you if they prefer technical details or simply a few images to work with.
- 2) If you sense they are not finding a lesson helpful, stop it and ask if they'd like you to try to come at the problem from a different angle because this one isn't working.
- 3) Tell them they may not get better right away, but after one or two lessons, they should know whether or not there's a good fit between the two of you. If not, don't hesitate to recommend another instructor who might be a better fit.
- 4) Ask them to tell you what they like about your style and what is most effective in getting through to them. This also provides reinforcement about how they learn best.
- 5) Remind them that they can't blame the teacher if they don't practice or play much and are not getting better.

There are a lot of good golf instructors out there, and I've seen my share of them. They are worth their weight in gold. Ultimately, it's the student's responsibility to take control of his or her own learning. And it's the PGA Professional's job to figure out how best to make that happen.