



The Game of a Lifetime - Becoming an Extraordinary Leader

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Ask any golfer and they enthusiastically explain how golf mirrors life. Non-golfers are not impressed and, with a perplexed look will ask, "What in thedoes that mean?" Simply, it means that the way you present yourself in life (and business) will be the way you show up on the golf course. If you are a "happy-go-lucky" kind of guy, easygoing in business and with your family, that's how you will approach golf. If you are a Type A person, chances are you will approach golf with the same driver style. If you are always measuring yourself against others or letting your work define who you are, that's how you will be while playing golf.

On the other hand, if you see life as possibilities, that's how you will play golf. A drive in the trees, rather than bringing disparaging remarks about yourself or your club, will be an opportunity to use your six iron to see what kind of shot you can create in, around, or through the woods. Yes, how you are in life will be how you are on the golf course. That is the reason golf is an excellent environment for experiential learning. Golf is a great way to grow your awareness and develop skills that you use in business every day. We can use golf specifically to develop Emotional Intelligence (EI).

Emotional Intelligence is defined as "an array of capabilities, competencies, and skills that influences one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures." Healthy relationships and coping strategies are key to success in any human endeavor, business or home. Over two decades of research indicate that emotional-social intelligence is what separates the average from the best performers in business. Developing emotional intelligence takes managers and leaders from average to *extraordinary*.

What is extraordinary leadership? For many people in new positions of leadership, it means winning or beating the competition. Many of the top management gurus define success as first developing yourself and then developing others so they can make their best contributions to the organization. Leaders create meaning for their followers and help them to define success. The game of golf offers us an opportunity to explore how we define success.

What is success? Let's define it as the ability to set and achieve our personal and professional goals, whatever they are. We might differ in our definition of success. And it will ebb and flow over the course of our lifetime. But I'm sure the basic aim is to succeed on our own terms, or at least terms acceptable to us, in all kinds of situations-the consistent development of ones potential in any human endeavor. Typically what keeps us from performing at peak levels from day to day or in different situations is not our skill or physical talent. The illusory butterfly of "success" is our mindset, our belief system, and our mental-emotional attitude.

As many golfers will attest, it is not always the most physically fit or skilled persons that shoot the best score. At some point in every golfer's life, the mental-emotional game becomes what is keeping them from reaching their potential. As Tiger has demonstrated time and time again, he is physically talented, but it is his mental-emotional toughness that enables him to consistently perform at peak levels. It's the same in business. A solid body of research indicates that the skills of emotional-social intelligence enable leaders to perform at consistent peak levels.

At a certain point in every career, IQ's are fairly consistent with others at that same level. IQ does not change after a certain age, but EI can continue to grow and expand. What differentiates the good from the great is the capability to engage appropriate emotional-social competencies for any given situation. What causes a career to derail is not our skill, or IQ. It is the inability to control our emotional-social skill and interactions in challenging situations - *to consistently and in a healthy way, cope with the demands and pressures of the environment*, i.e., Emotional Intelligence. Therefore, golf offers individuals, whether they play golf or not, an experiential environment to learn and develop emotional intelligence, as well as define their own parameters for success. This type of learning leads to sustainable behavioral change. Research shows that experiential learning is the best environment for adult development that leads to permanent change. Golf provides that opportunity.



At this point I want to emphasize that golf offers this unique opportunity to any of us. You don't have to be a golfer to engage the game as a learning environment. In many ways, being a novice in golf is the same as accepting a new job offer or a new management position. When you accept any new position, much of what you need to know is garnered from experience on the job. You don't enter that position knowing all the skills and tools to be the best. You have to learn new skills, and many times you have to work with people who are also learning new skills. Being new to golf gives you a direct experience of what it is like to be a new manager at any level of your organization, or work at an unfamiliar task. So you can see, whether you are addicted to the game or whether you have never touched, or had no desire to touch a club, golf is a great environment for learning.

Let's look at some specific competencies. The above example of working with new employees or anyone learning a new skill or new position requires patience and understanding. Empathy is an Emotional Intelligence competency that the best leaders exhibit in even the most challenging times. When we offer an EI golf engagement, one of the practices is for people to work with others to learn a new skill. For beginners it might be simply getting comfortable with the grip. For experienced golfers, it could be bunker shots. For all it is putting with your eyes closed. How well do you accept coaching? How patient, empathetic are you with someone who takes a bit longer than you would like? What does your behavior look like when you are not showing empathy? How does it affect the behavior of those you are trying to influence?

Another EI skill is Reality Testing. Reality Testing is the capacity to "read" situations accurately, to size up what's going on. Persons with a highly sophisticated Reality Testing are able to tap into a group's emotional currents and power relationships, the shifting alliances and allegiances that swirl beneath the surface. Reality Testing lets us tune in to a situation while maintaining a broader and correct perspective; to focus and concentrate on ways of coping with what we discover and to keep our emotions in check, uncolored by illusions. Office politics, human relationships, difficult interactions, demanding situations and dynamic environments all call for capability in Reality Testing. Tuning into your environment and adjusting behavior according to the specific demands of the circumstance

are considered essential for job success.

Every shot in golf presents an opportunity to engage Reality Testing, to make sure we are seeing the situation and options realistically without letting our emotions overrun our best judgment. Are you choosing the right club for the shot? Is your shot selection appropriate for your skill level? Are you present to the existing shot or are you ruminating about the past and what happened the last time you were up against this challenge? In business, what is the appropriate approach to the situation? Remember the last time you choked while giving a presentation to superiors? What and where are your thoughts as you prepare for another presentation to the same people? Every shot in golf is an opportunity to choke or excel. With EI, you are in control.

The Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina identified Self Regard as a primary skill for high-level leaders. From a group of over 5000 leaders, Self Regard showed up as an important competency of Emotional Intelligence as well. Self Regard is the ability to see oneself as capable, recognize one's strengths and weakness, and embrace one's ability to learn and develop. A great manager and leader needs a healthy sense of Self Regard coupled with humility, as Jim Collins, in his best selling book, "Good To Great", illustrated. Self Regard and humility both are at play when making difficult choices. These decisions are often made in adverse situations. Leaders have to trust in their ability, and also know that they *will* make errors. Self Regard and humility are precursors to resiliency and perseverance. Despite setbacks, self-regard and humility contribute to the ability to recognize a mistake, regroup, and move forward with clarity. Self-regard and humility are two valuable components of leadership! Two invaluable components of golf!

Without the skills of self-regard and humility, leaders often begin the downward spiral related to negative self-talk. They begin to think of themselves as failures, not working at their potential. It begins to affect their identity as a worthwhile human being. Many golfers equate their identity with their score, which is how they define success. One of the first questions I ask as a Sport Psychologist (and one of the questions the First Tee asks each player) is, "Can you accept yourself as a worthy human being regardless of your score?" Most say yes. And then we see the reality on the course.



Scores in golf, like poor decisions in business, impact our self-regard. Golf gives us many opportunities to look at self-regard and humility. It is the perfect environment to grow these skills. Our self-talk, in golf or every day life, can set us up for success or failure. Negative self-talk stifles our ability to reach our potential, which relates to another EI competency, Self Actualization. Golf offers many chances to be aware of our self-talk, begin to make a choice for a better internal dialogue, and the chance to work towards our potential.

I can give examples for all of the fifteen competencies of Emotional Intelligence that we measure and choose to develop. They function separately and they also interrelate. Golf is an environment for learning because it gives us a real time experience and the opportunity to grow and to observe the growth in present time. It gives opportunities to develop our awareness, to make wise choices, and to trust ourselves in challenging situations. Once you have learned it on the golf course, you optimize the chances of successfully engaging your emotional intelligence at work and at home.

The LeadershipOne EI and Golf Workshops

At our EI and Golf workshops, we focus on professional and personal growth in Emotional Intelligence through the experience of golf in a fun and relaxing environment. Fred Shoemaker, author of "Extraordinary Golf", one of the books we use in our workshop, says that when learning becomes more important to you than your score, your game will

improve and you will begin to play to your potential with consistency. Now you can learn every time you step on a golf course. When you see golf as an opportunity to develop your capabilities, competencies, and skills in emotional intelligence, not only will you expand your EI, you will begin to experience improvement in your golf scores.

Even for non-golfers this is a fun way to develop your Emotional Intelligence, and who knows, you might learn to love the game as much as your buddies. For both, golf becomes an enjoyable, fun, and relaxing experience. No longer is golf "a good walk spoiled." The game that captures so many people's interest and imagination becomes an extraordinary experience and an exciting way to become an extraordinary leader-at work and at home!

We'd enjoy seeing you on the links. So give us a call to learn when our next Golf and EI session will be conducted.

Dianna, Senior Associate with LeadershipOne, is a management consultant and executive coach, specializing in helping leaders measure and grow their Emotional Intelligence on their path to becoming extraordinary leaders.

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