



In the focus zone

Columnist: Mandy Lamkin, Enrich Australia director

If you play golf, you'll be familiar with the fact a lack of concentration is responsible for a lot of mistakes made in the game. Arnold Palmer once said: "The toughest six inches in the game of golf is between a player's ears."

And so it is in business, where a shortcut to lowering the number of swings at the ball it takes to succeed could well be to master the mental skill of powerful focus.

There are several analogies worth exploring between the game of golf and managing a business. A lot of golfers tend to think that to improve their game they must purely centre on the physical aspects: train more, find a new coach, watch videos and change their equipment. But one of the most overlooked and important aspects of the game is the quality of mental focus or concentration applied to each task at hand and how, when these are linked, there emerges a natural, impenetrable flow to the entire game. This is essentially what they mean by getting into the zone.

In business this relates to ensuring each important task is completed with mindfulness and attention to detail as well as big-picture expertise – qualities often evident in those who succeed and succeed well. There's a kind of holistic and effortless flow about how they work. And in terms of dealing with clients, focus puts us fully in the moment with them, which they can feel.

WHAT'S THIS FOCUS?

The kind of focus I'm talking about here means being truly present, concentrating the mind on a single objective or circumstance. Like the zone, it is, by its very nature, a place you go alone.

To begin to understand the impact of focus let's look at where there may be a lack of it, and the consequences.

Go back to your golf and think for a moment about how you currently

approach the game. Do you just walk up to the ball, prepare on auto-pilot and then rush the shot? Does the ball land in a spot on the golf course seemingly chosen by its will or yours? Whatever the answer, it is likely to be because of where your mind was.

Being focused in this instance means awareness is patiently built even before you plant your tee. You are fully aware of approaching the ball. You're totally in your body as you prepare. You maintain focused attention on the ball while you're making the shot. You then sustain that focus right to the end of the swing and even as you lower the club. Only then do you begin to think about walking off to the next shot (and the next shot only).

This all sounds pretty rigid, but like everything else to do with improving your game, you need to practise to build confidence and familiarity with it. It is often very difficult to abandon old ways – especially mental habits – and suspend the temptation to think about the whole game from the outset. A game plan is vital, but when you include in it the discipline around this approach, you'll be amazed at the immediate result it can have on all aspects of your game, including distance and accuracy of your shots. You begin to trust and choose in a more conscious way where the ball will land.

Need I say that in the above, there is nothing that cannot also be translated as a parallel for how you relate to your business and interaction with clients?

HOW TO DEVELOP FOCUS

It's better to make 10 truly focused swings than 100 quick, thoughtless ones. The problem with this theory is that old habits get in the way, so before you even get to the course, practise developing mental focus.

To begin, set aside some time to just do this exercise and find a quiet spot

to sit by yourself. Now find an object that can become your regular object of concentration. Choose something plain and mundane that won't move around, for example, an apple, pen or particular piece of the wall in front of you. Make sure what you choose as your object, and where you place it, is easy to rest your eyes on for a while. It's not about what object you choose, rather the process you will apply to it. Hence, it's also important the object doesn't have emotional affiliation, as this distraction will make it harder to clear your mind and concentrate.

Now, taking a wide, calming breath, rest your eyes on the object – keeping your attention focused on that one thing. It's okay to blink when you need to. All kinds of thoughts and distractions will naturally flow into your mind, but try to maintain your eye and mental focus on the object – this is where the benefit is. The aim and skill of the exercise is to continually bring the mental attention back to the item you are focusing on. Each time your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the object.

I suggest you try this exercise for about two to five minutes at first, increasing the length of attention and concentration over time to, say, 15 or 20 minutes. Just remember to keep your breath free and your body relaxed while you're doing it. Turn off the phone.

Yes, it will require patience and persistence, but once you've experienced the outcomes of refining your concentration in your golf, sorry, your business, you'll be inspired to continually enhance your ability to focus. For more help and information on this area, go to www.mindfulness.com.au and www.golfmind-body.com.

By introducing some refined focusing skills into your life you will influence and improve every single aspect of it. Now you're talking zone. «

“
Like the zone, it is, by its very nature, a place you go alone.
”