



A GOLF VIGNETTE DEMONSTRATING A “MIND SET”

I worked with a golfing pro who wanted to improve his putting. He was having problems sinking puts within a 5 to 10 foot range. I agreed to accompany and observe him while he played nine holes on his home course. When the ball came within a ten-or-so foot range of the cup, he would freeze and miss the putt. He did well lining up the ball but then would falter when executing the shot preventing it from going into the cup. Even with the putting problem, he shot below par which was remarkable.

I only made a few comments throughout the exercise. I was intent on watching to try and capture how he mentally approached his game especially what he was doing when putting. When he wasn't putting, he went through a repetitious “mental ritual” that seemed to enable him to strike and place the ball with a good deal of accuracy. There was some barely audible muttering and a slight “waggle” previous to striking the ball which tended to produce a sense of confidence.

Now I know that it isn't unusual for many golfers to go through some repetitive motions before striking the ball which can become a helpful mental tool. It's like their “signature”. Some players take a certain number of practice swings, others stand behind the ball to determine distance and direction, club use and accuracy of placing the ball where they want, others will plant their feet a certain number of times before putting and still others have what's called a “little waggle” they perform just prior to ball contact. There's nothing wrong with these rituals. In fact, when I was coaching kids on baseball and hockey teams, in order to help them gain a more positive attitude, I would encourage them to practice some fun superstitious behaviors which would get their minds off of their losing streaks while emphasizing their having fun while playing their game. Interestingly, the payoff was that they won some games they were expected to lose against better teams.

Getting back to our golfer, when it came time for him to putt the ball, he seemed to be thinking like the agnostic who attended church on a weekly basis just in case he might be wrong. In other words, instead of creating a “positive” mental attitude, the putting ritual tended to reinforce doubt and negativity in his mind. The ritual for his putting was different than the one he used striking the ball on the fairway but he believed that his ritual would rid him of the “jitters” or “yips” as its

commonly called in golf. It was a combination of verbiage, stance and body movement. However, instead of relaxing him, he became tenser in anticipation of the missed putt. He thought that he was positively influencing the outcome but instead was creating a deja vous result...failure.

After a well-placed second iron shot on the 6th par 4 hole, the ball landed about 10 feet from the cup. He was about to address the ball for his birdie attempt. I stopped him while taking his practice swings and just after he completed his “putting ritual”. He seemed to resent my interrupting his pattern and looked at me in anticipation while awaiting my next directive. I said “for this shot, I want you to turn your club around so that you’re holding the club head instead of the grip, kneel down and use your club as a pool cue to put it in the cup”. I remember his waiting a moment and giving me a strange look but ultimately he did as I asked. As you might have guessed, he put it in the cup without any difficulty.

Apart from the ridiculously unorthodox directive, I asked what difference there was in his sinking that putt vs. the conventional way he replied “none...they both went into the cup”. I asked what he learned from that exercise and he replied that he now realized how his *mentally approaching* these types of putts was more the issue than his inability to make them. We talked about how I purposely interrupted the “mind set” he had become so accustomed to experiencing...viz. his missing the put and how that negatively influenced the outcome. I recommended that he consciously learn how to interrupt that “mind set” on his own until it became an unconsciously positive pattern. Remember that “mind sets” tend to make us very stubborn and even though they interfere with our performance, we tend to resist changing them because of their familiarity. We discussed the fact that change is something that is difficult for many people and the more fluid we are in being able to entertain and accept change in life, the more capable we become in introducing positive thinking into our mind’s repertoire. We usually believe that we can’t change them and have to learn to live with them. In effect, usually it’s not about being unable to change the pattern but more about our resistance to change.

A Brief Biographical Sketch

After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.

Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a "mind game", he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.

He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.

Charles invites you to view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address (charles@charlesmbonasera.com). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is "seeking alternative methods to happiness" and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: "enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.