
Golf: Mastering the Head Game

Executive coach, author and creator of the W.I.N. Way of Present Moment Leadership, John Kuypers describes the one thing every golfer needs to master if they want to master the head game of golf. Learn how you can shave strokes off your game, and help you enjoy the great game even more...

Unlike many sports, golf is truly a game that is played against oneself. For that reason, the head game of golf is that much more noticeable and conquering it that much more important. Every seasoned golfer knows that 'in-swing thoughts' will send any shot slicing off towards the trees faster than a gale force wind!

The secret to conquering the head game of golf is to be present. When Tiger Woods was asked how he made a crucial shot to win the 2000 PGA championship, he responded, "I simply tried to stay in the moment, and focus on the shot I had to make." Richard Zokol, one of Canada's best-known tour professionals, has become an outspoken proponent of the importance of being "in the present" on his weekly golf tips TV show.

What is it to be fully present? It is to have no thoughts or feelings that are unrelated to what is actually happening NOW. Thoughts like, "I'm going to miss this one." "This time I'm going to sink this putt!" and, "What if I'm using the wrong club?" are just three of a thousand examples of thoughts that are about the past or the future. Dwelling on past misses and fearing future failures are what cause the thoughts that take you out of being fully present.

These thoughts often seem uncontrollable. Even when you know you 'shouldn't' be having these thoughts, you have them anyway! Overcoming your instinctive desire to have thoughts, whether in golf or in thinking about work on weekends, is a challenge that will yield many benefits to you, both on the course and off the course.

How do you do stop thinking and be present? You must let go of the outcome that you want. You must be unattached to the result you want - to hit the drive straight, make the chip shot or sink the putt. When these outcomes don't matter to you, your thoughts will naturally focus on what's important now - the swing. To be in the moment is to have all of your being - mind, body, heart and soul - focused on the swing that is in your control and not on the

outcome you want, which is definitely not in your control!

How do you become unattached to getting lower scores, hitting good shots and sinking par putts? You must begin to *notice* when you are attached. Then you must do something that you will find most unnatural and uncomfortable. You must *accept* these unwelcome thoughts and feelings. This is the true secret. When you accept them, they will begin to dissipate. When you fight them, curse them, attempt to banish them, they will stay with you more than ever.

The effect is like the smoker who tries to quit smoking by sheer willpower. The desire to smoke remains ever present, ever waiting for a weak moment, whereupon the will breaks down and the cigarette is quickly lit. **However, when the smoker accepts their desire to smoke, the desire begins to go away.** The "head game" of smoking begins to be won.

This same principle applies to all of life. When a person begins to notice and accept the thoughts and feelings they are actually having in the present, the "head game" of stress, anxiety and frustration begins to be won. Those thoughts begin to be replaced by an appreciation of the joy of this present, and the awareness that **no matter what happened in the past or what lies ahead, in this moment, your best effort is good enough.**

John Kuypers is the president of W.I.N. Leadership, an executive coaching & leadership development firm. He is the creator of the W.I.N. Way of Present Moment Leadership that helps executives lead by making numerous small, high impact changes to their leadership style. John is the author of the personal leadership book, **What's Important Now**. He can be reached at www.winleadership.com