

## Fed up with inconsistency on the golf course?

Do you shoot 79 one week and 92 the next? Do you shoot great on the front side only to blow up on the back? Or make a quadruple bogie on 18 to ruin that career round? Many golfers experience this frustration and it is often put down to being “just part of the game”. But what if those inconsistencies could be eliminated? You may be surprised to learn that with a little practice you could develop the skill to think differently at those crucial moments and that this change in mindset may be the key to taking your game to the next level. You may also be surprised to learn that improving consistency on the golf course may also increase consistency and performance at work and in other areas of life.

Most PGA professionals would agree that there are five steps to improving your game: **professional swing instruction, properly-fitted equipment, practice, play, and a positive attitude**. I have covered instruction and equipment in previous articles. Now let's get down to performance and how to consistently play to your potential.

Do you perform better when you are happy and relaxed or when you are anxious and fearful? The answer goes without saying. Picture yourself on the links with a tough shot over a deep pot bunker to a tight flag. Most of us would probably agree that we would be a little anxious over such a tough shot. But what if we could recognize feelings of anxiety before they impact us, then make a positive shift in our mindset before executing the shot - would the result be better?

There is a growing body of research that links performance to emotional state. A leader in this research is the Institute of HeartMath, an organization based in Boulder Creek, California ([www.heartmath.com](http://www.heartmath.com)). They have proven that certain emotions have an effect on heart rhythms and that these heart rhythms determine the effectiveness of the way in which our brains process information. Translated to physical performance, fear and anxiety will result in reactive jerky movements, while feelings of appreciation or joy will result in a state of coherence and relaxation, which encourages optimal performance.

How many times have you stood on the tee of a par 3 facing a challenging tee shot over water, only to hit a poor shot? In disgust, but with the pressure off, you hit another shot perfectly, exactly how you had pictured the first one! The fact is the presence of anxiety will always impede your ability to access your true potential. Once that anxiety has passed (the second swing), you are free to perform optimally.

The Institute of HeartMath has developed tools that allow us to monitor our emotional state in real time. For most of us, the challenge is to recognize that anxiety is present before it has a negative impact on our performance. Imagine having a tool that can not only make you aware of anxiety, but give you the opportunity to quickly shift that feeling to a more productive one before hitting a shot. The emWave® Personal Stress Reliever is such a device.

We use the emWave in all our Creative Golf teambuilding, executive coaching and mental game workshops. It is a small portable biofeedback device that measures your emotional state at any given moment. This real-time feedback gives you the opportunity to think differently and shift your thoughts to a more productive place that allows you to perform optimally. With just a little coaching, you can learn to recognize these states and catch them before they cause you to self-destruct on the golf course.

Laird Small, director of the Pebble Beach Golf Academy and the 2003 PGA of America Teacher of the Year says: “Almost all golfers get in their own way emotionally. HeartMath shows them exactly how

different emotions affect performance, and most importantly, gives them the tools to change a destructive emotion to a productive emotion right on the spot.”

The emWave is not limited to improving golf performance. In fact, this device, along with other biofeedback tools developed by HeartMath, is used in the areas of corporate performance, health care and wellness, education, emergency services, the military, and athletics. Regardless of your field, paying attention to how you feel could be the next major breakthrough in human performance.

Perhaps one of the most significant uses of this new technology is in education. Children today are faced with more stress than ever before. Educators at all levels are using HeartMath technology to assist children in test-taking, overall comprehension, and to develop problem-solving skills. One major study found that 74% of students using HeartMath products demonstrated significant reductions in their test anxiety levels and dramatic improvements in test scores.

More and more, golf professionals are starting to realize the importance of teaching students how to play the game from the emotional perspective. Lynn Marriott and Pia Nilsson of Golf54 and Vision54 have said: “When the heart rhythm becomes smooth and coherent, it signals the brain and nervous system to operate in sync. Cortical function is facilitated and the brain opens to new possibilities.” Lynn and Pia conduct golf schools in Arizona and are experts in using HeartMath technology. They help their students play to their potential by learning to recognize their emotional state and to make adjustments when necessary. Incidentally, for those of you not familiar with her, Pia coached Annika Sorenstam when she was on the Swedish National team early in her career. Annika credits Pia for helping her establish a solid mental game.

If you would like to learn more, I recommend visiting [www.heartmath.com](http://www.heartmath.com). In addition, a recent article in the May edition of Golf Digest, *Playing with Heart*, by Jaime Diaz, offers insight into this new field of learning.

At Creative Golf we believe that players will always perform to their potential when they learn the signs of stress or anxiety and learn to think differently when they threaten to affect performance. The secret to playing more consistently may actually lie in paying closer attention to what you are thinking and learning to focus your energy on thoughts that are empowering.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in trying out the emWave. Whether your goal is to perform better at work, on the golf course, or even help your child's performance in school, please join us for an informational session at the club. We would like to offer you the opportunity to consistently perform to your potential every time you tee it up.



***Doug Hodges is a Class A PGA Professional and founder of Creative Golf, an organization specializing in unique corporate teambuilding events that use golf as a vehicle to emphasize creativity in the workplace. Teambuilding events and golf schools are conducted at the Heritage Golf Club. For more information, contact Doug at (919) 453-2020, ext. 11, or visit [www.thinkworkplay.com](http://www.thinkworkplay.com).***